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SPIDER-MAN

#30

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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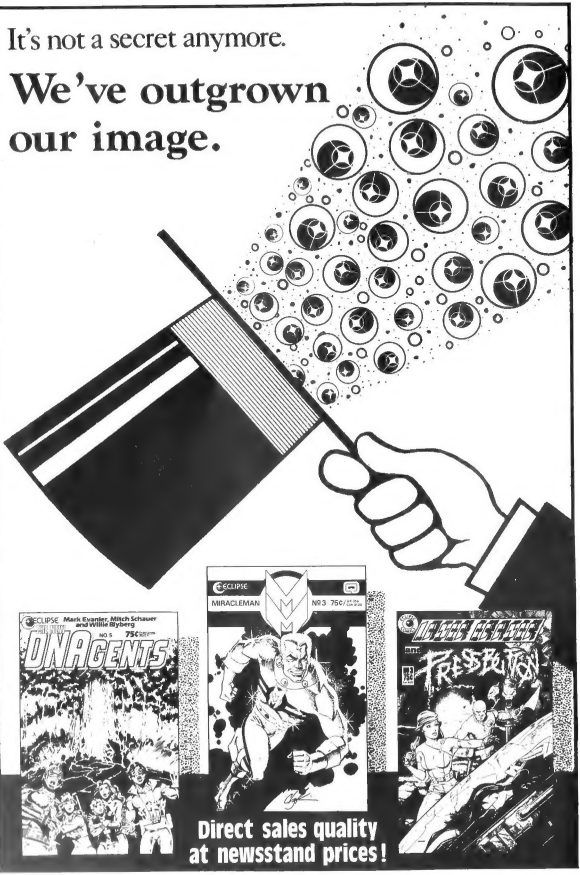

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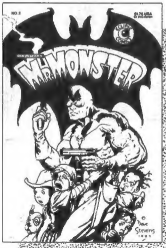

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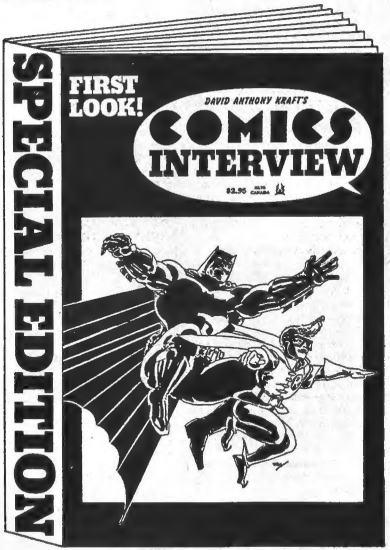

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Last issue in this space, I re-entered the editorial arena -- and promised to explain a bit more this month about my absence. Before taking a vacation from this space, I'd worked non-stop days and nights and weekends for better than a year. "All work and no play makes DAK a dull boy." I had nothing to say!

It occurred to me after last summer, during which Lesley and I produced the magazine bi-weekly to all intents and purposes, that what I'd done was inadvertantly to create a "New York lifestyle" in Northern Georgia (where I maintain my mountaintop Fortress of Solitude). If I really wanted a hurried, harried, deadline-driven life, I could have stayed in the midst of Manhattan working for Marvel. What I always enjoyed about the country was the more humane pace of life, time to "stop and smell the roses." But by continually racing, my behavior was beginning to border on so-called "Type A" with a lot of hurry sickness and stress, which I was, after all, creating myself. I'd slipped into it bit by bit, rushing to make this or that deadline, screaming down Screamer Mountain in the jeep (from my front door to the post office in 7 minutes and woe to any animal life in my path), until I found myself rushing against mental deadlines for no reason at all, even when I went down to see friends.

This is not conducive to a happy, healthy life. So I've been trying to change some of my personal patterns, developing new work habits, catching myself at hurry-sickness and slowing down, easing up. I'm deliberately seeking a little more measure and balance.

I guess that's what life's all about.

-Dave

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G ENTIRE NER M SHORT CIRCU E BRUISING • JOI G • **DALGODA 8!** RINDING •NOSTR • KIDNEY DAMA T TWISTING • SHI

© 1985 Alan Moore & Steve Parkhouse

"Writing SPIDER-MAN was horrible."

JAN STRNAD

With a nervous smile, the young fan offered a copy of ELFQUEST. "Couldja sign this. I really love your stuff!"

Jan Strnad grinned broadly and pointed to the guest table on his left. "She's often told me she could never have done ELFQUEST without me, but THAT *is Wendy Pini. Have you read DALGODA?"*

A broad grin is often the only defense a writer offers in the world of comic books. Art is supreme; art is worshipped. And thirteen years of scripts for CREEPY, EERIE, FEVER DREAMS, SWORD OF THE ATOM, SPIDER-MAN and DALGODA are not the stuff of fame for comics readers.

But Jan Strnad (Struh-Nod) is a name among his peers in the comics industry. That name is synonymous with craftsmanship, innovation and originality.

*In 1973, Jan graduated from Wichita State University and had already published more work than most of his professors. His first sale was to Warren's CREEPY. That was preceded, however, by several years of self-publishing his work in ANOMALY, and writing "Eyeing the Egos" in a fanzine called RB*CC. Through his work on ANOMALY, Jan formed a working relationship with Richard Corben which eventually brought Jan, the writer, and Richard, the artist, their first notoriety.*

As of issue #8, DALGODA will become FLESH AND BONES, with the same main character, plus a back-up by Alan Moore. Also, Jan has written his first animated film treatment.

MICHAEL VANCE: *What first piqued your interest in comic books?*

JAN STRNAD: That's how I learned to read — from comic books. I don't know what attracted me to them. I suppose it was what attracts any kid, which is the colors and the fact that they look interesting visually. That got me interested in reading, in general. The only difference between myself and the general public is that I never outgrew them.

MICHAEL: *Did you always want to be a comic-book writer, or did you want to write other things?*

JAN: I would love to write other things. I've written a novel that's so far gathered 55 rejections and refusals-to-read.

MICHAEL: *A genre novel?*

JAN: That's one of its big problems, because it falls inbetween *genres*. I feel that if I'm going to submit it anymore, I need to rewrite it and make it either a science-fiction novel or a mainstream novel. Right now, it straddles the two categories, and makes it very hard to pigeonhole. One of the big problems I have in even submitting it is that they don't know what department to shuffle it to. So, that was a lesson learned.

I've written a screenplay that has not been produced. I just use it as a sample to show that I can do a screenplay. Right now, I've just signed a contract to do a treatment for an animated feature.

MICHAEL: *For what company?*

JAN: It's for a group of Japanese businessmen who want to do an animated or live-action movie about the Monkey, who is an Oriental folk hero. They asked me to write a treatment, 25-page synopsis for the animated cartoon — this is the first film work that I'm actually getting paid for. I'd like to do more straight text- and prose-writing, as opposed to comic books, but the problem is writing a novel could take a year — then you spend another year trying to sell it, and

"DUBAY, at Warren, rewrote my dialogue into

OF COURSE IT WAS RIDICULOUS; SHE HAD TAKEN A FEVER, GONE INTO A COMA, AND NEVER WOKE UP. SHE WAS DEAD. TOTALLY, FOREVER. THE TESTS HAD PROVEN IT. HADN'T THEY?
HARRY FELT THE NUMBNESS SEEP THROUGH HIS BODY. HE WELCOMED THE SHROUD COVERING HIS MIND, FORCING HIM TO FORGET!

Part of Jan's CREEPY story, "Like a Phone Booth, Long and Narrow."

you're starving. Comic books — I do a story and I get paid immediately, and I can write two stories a month and make a pretty good living at it.

MICHAEL: *When did you begin reading comics?*

JAN: Late '50s. I was born in 1950.

MICHAEL: *When did you decide to write comic books?*

JAN: That's pretty hard to determine. In junior high school a friend and I wrote and drew our own comics, which we exchanged back and forth. First work that I did professionally was when I was working my way through college and needing a little extra money. There was a comic-book company, Warren Publications in New York, which was very agreeable to freelance submissions. So, I would write a little eight-page horror story and get $45 for it. It helped pay the rent back then.

MICHAEL: *Let's talk about Warren, which folded about two or three years ago. When did you start with Warren?*

JAN: Well, let's see. I missed the **Archie Goodwin** period when he was the editor. I started working with an editor named **J. R. Cochran**, whom I thought was very good.

MICHAEL: *Then you worked under Bill Dubay as your editor?*

JAN: Yes. **Cochran** and I had a real good relationship, and he was replaced by someone else, and I don't know who that was. He wanted the scripts in a certain format. I tried, but couldn't work in it very well, so I just let the Warren involvement die. And at that time, I was getting into doing underground comics with **Richard Corben** and **Robert Kline** and other people. So, I had another market, then.

MICHAEL: *How did you break into Warren — by submitting scripts?*

JAN: Right.

MICHAEL: *Isn't it very unusual for comic-book companies to even consider scripts today?*

JAN: Unsolicited like that, yes. Very much so.

MICHAEL: *How long did it take? One, two scripts?*

JAN: First one.

MICHAEL: *How did you meet Richard Corben?*

JAN: I was putting out a fanzine called ANOMALY, and I got back from a convention and was looking through the new subscribers, and there was **Richard Corben's** name and address. He was just getting into fan work at that time. I liked his stuff. So I contacted him about doing some illustrations for us. He did spot illustrations for a prose piece that I wrote. I was just knocked over by his stuff. I wrote a comic script, and Richard illustrated it, and did a super job on it. That worked out real well — he liked working with me, and I liked working with him. So, we started doing occasional pieces for Warren or the undergrounds.

MICHAEL: *Did you and Corben break into Warren as a team?*

JAN: Not together, but pretty much at the same time.

MICHAEL: *With the exception of HEAVY METAL magazine, Corben isn't doing much work seen by comic-book fans.*

JAN: That's true. Right now, he's doing Western art and selling it at craft fairs. Prints.

MICHAEL: *Is that because he's burned out on doing comic books?*

JAN: It's a lot of work for the reward — and, yes, I think he is discouraged by it, a little bit, because of the changing climate of comic books. Right now, you pretty much have to do super-hero work. The underground is dead. There are a few hangers-on like Kitchen Sink Publishing that does an occasional underground. There just isn't much market for the type of work Richard wants to do. There's an occasional piece in HEAVY METAL.

MICHAEL: *Towards the end of Warren's publishing run, they began to get a very poor reputation for excessive violence and sex in their books. When I spoke with you several years ago, you said you'd had troubles with the editor actually changing your dialogue without notifying you. Did that really upset you?*

JAN: Yeah, it did quite a bit. It was **Bill Dubay** who was editing a magazine called 1984 — which was later changed to 1994. **Corben** and I agreed to do a series that would run in color in 1984. The book hadn't come out yet — we really didn't have any idea what it was going to be like. We submitted the series, and **Dubay** started a policy — that was, I thought, reprehensible — of changing the dialogue and putting in very juvenile and vulgar expressions, rewriting everything to where I was embarrassed to have my name on it. The late **Wally Wood** had a real problem with this. A lot of people were upset by it. But we were already under contract, so we finished out the series. Then, Warren wanted to republish the series as an album, and we simply refused. Of course, that annoyed them to no end. It wasn't until the last couple of years when a Spanish publisher came out with an American edition of the series, called MUTANT WORLD, that the original dialogue was restored, which I was very grateful for. That was really the reason for my final split with Warren.

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He's Back!
ETERNITY SMITH
In July from Renegade Press

vulgar expressions . . . I was embarassed."

MICHAEL: *A lot of people consider Corben's work to be excessively violent and graphically sexual in nature. Do you differ on your views with Corben on how sex and violence should be handled in comics?*

JAN: Right now, we have just reached a parting of the ways — in which he is still wanting to do adult material, and I'm wanting to hit a younger and wider audience. Because that's where the market is. There isn't a market for adult material anymore. Also, it gets tiring to have a kind of negative censorship put on you. We had an agent tell us during the MUTANT WORLD series to remove the heroine's shirt because the readers wanted to see her breasts. To me, that's just as obnoxious as having somebody tell me to cover up breasts if I want to expose them in a story.

MICHAEL: *Do you think Richard Corben would agree with what you are saying now?*

JAN: I don't know. I just have no idea of exactly what he's thinking these days.

MICHAEL: *Do you feel violence and graphic sex have a place* anywhere *in the medium of comics?*

JAN: I don't know why not. The First Amendment Constitutional rights of people to produce work without censorship is much, much more important than any need to suppress this type of material. The crucial aspect — which is what I've been trying to get across to the comic-book industry for years — is that you need to label the material. You don't make it look like an ordinary comic book, which is generally perceived as a children's medium. Put a label on it which says "Recommended for Mature Readers," or use a rating of some sort, like the movie industry. Let the people know what they're going to get — I think you owe society that much.

MICHAEL: *How broad a market do comic books really have today in America?*

JAN: Potentially, I think, it could be virtually unlimited.

MICHAEL: *Realistically, who are your readers?*

JAN: Adolescent boys. And I think that is pathetic. I think it's very sad, because if you look at countries like Japan, where comic books don't have the stigma of being just for children, and are read by people of both sexes and all ages — there are comic books for young kids and young adults, and the older people. There aren't the limitations of the American comic-book industry.

MICHAEL: *A double-edged question: Why are they still perceived as kid's books in America, and how can that perception be changed?*

JAN: There are several problems. They are perceived as children's literature by the general public because I believe that's what the public has been offered. If we're going to get a broader market, we have to offer material that is genuinely mature — and I don't mean just sex and violence, but something that would be stimulating intellectually to an adult market.

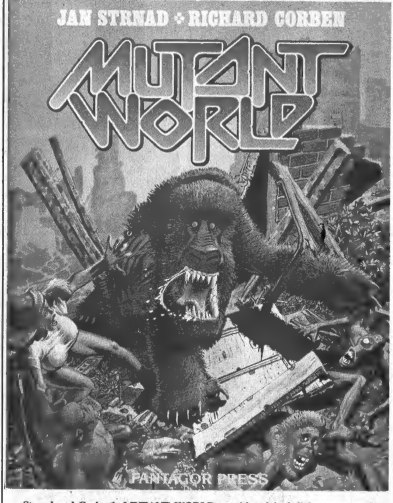
MICHAEL: *Is there anything being done along those lines right now, in your opinion?*

JAN: Oh, yeah, sure. There are comic books in the alternate market. I think my DALGODA can be read by an older audience. Certainly, the back-up feature, "Grimwood's Daughter," by myself and **Kevin Nowlan** was for mature readers. I think it's much more mature than most of the stuff people watch on TV most of the time. The only way we're going to expand the market is by providing genuinely mature material. The problem is that there is a very limited market right now — these are very tough times that we have to weather through with small circulations for mature books and high price-tags, because the cost per unit is so out of line with "regular" comics. But the material has to be there. We also have to give wider distribution. Not just in comic-book shops and convenience stores, but we've got to get them in book stores, and probably change the format and get them to look more like books, and less like comic magazines.

MICHAEL: *Are there any other steps that could be taken to change the general attitude that comics are for children?*

JAN: Advertising, of course, would be a very good way, but it's very expensive. It doesn't pay to advertise on television. There isn't that much profit in it.

MICHAEL: *Do other media work against the acceptance of comics by adults? I've noticed that any time television covers a comics convention, the focus is directed on the more*



Strnad and Corben's MUTANT WORLD — with original dialogue restored.

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"I wrote radio and TV ads for candidates."

bizarre elements such as the costume show. And the attitude presented is generally, "Gee, aren't these folks a little wacky — adults reading kid stuff?"

JAN: Sure, absolutely. But I think that it's the result of a couple of things. It's the visual aspect. They're looking for something that's going to look good on TV. The second reason is ignorance on the part of the people doing the reporting. They don't realize that there are comic books for another audience. I know that, whenever I get interviewed for a newspaper, I get one of two approaches. It's sound effects in the title like POW! BAM! — MAN WRITES COMIC BOOKS! And the attitude that, "Gee, this guy actually makes his living writing comic books — isn't that amazing?" I think the industry, itself, could do a better job of educating reporters and people who are in media that there's a lot going on in comics — not just super-heroes or books for adolescent boys.

MICHAEL: *Have you received any negative input from other writers who don't write for comics, when they learn you do?*

JAN: That's one of the benefits of living in Wichita, Kansas. There aren't that many writers to associate with. There is **Rebecca Brandywine**, who writes romances, but I've never met her. Most of the people that I meet ask me, "What do you do?" And I say, "Well, I write fiction." And they ask, "What?" "Well, I write short fiction." "Like what?" "Well," *(covering his mouth and muttering)* "comic books." *(Laughter.)* Now I've found that it's better just to say, "Comic books!" — and look them in the eye. The people in Wichita are impressed by that, because there isn't anybody else there who writes comic books or writes for anything except for the newspapers or the city magazine.

MICHAEL: *Let's back-track a little more about Warren. When Warren went out of business, were you doing work for any one else?*

JAN: I hadn't been working for Warren for some time before they went out of business. After seeing what happened to MUTANT WORLD, where they changed the dialogue, I decided I didn't want to have anything more to do with them.

MICHAEL: *Did you immediately begin writing for someone else?*

JAN: That was when **Richard Corben** was beginning to do some work for HEAVY METAL, and we wrote "The New Tales of the Arabian Nights," a series for HEAVY METAL. All of this time, of

Splash from "What Rough Beast," a ROSEMARY'S BABY take-off Jan wrote for the May, 1972, issue of CREEPY. Art by Frank Brunner.

THUS FAR ALL ATTEMPTS TO SUBDUE THE CREATURE, HAVE BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL, THOUGH THE AUTHORITIES HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE...
...AND A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM BUT WHOSE CHILD? ...AND WHERE SHALL HE LEAD THEM?
BRUNNER
WHAT ROUGH BEAST
ART BY FRANK BRUNNER / STORY BY JAN S. STRNAD

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ALL NEW!
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"Getting into DC was ridiculously easy."

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WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT?
ALL THE NIGHTS WE CAME HERE. AND ALL THE TIMES YOU PROPOSED TO ME BEFORE I FINALLY ACCEPTED. YOU KNOW...
...YOU COULD HAVE SAVED US A LOT OF TROUBLE IF YOU'D JUST TAKEN "NO" FOR AN ANSWER!
STILL I'M GLAD YOU DIDN'T. IT WAS PRETTY GOOD, MOST OF THE TIME. WASN'T IT?
MOST OF THE TIME?
MOST OF THE TIME. IT WAS THE BEST.
"And with that, everything was decided. We would go our own ways, pursue our own dreams. And we did it with our love intact, still alive within us, just as it lives to this day."

Ray (ATOM) Palmer and Jean Loring reach a turning point. A remarkably adroit handling of marital difficulties in comics by Jan and Gil Kane, from SWORD OF THE ATOM SPECIAL #1.

course, I had a regular job, a full-time job. I was the office manager, to begin with, for a local Big Brothers agency in Wichita. I advanced with them, and was with them for about three and a half years when I decided to quit and to be a freelance writer. And, then around the time of "The New Tales of the Arabian Nights" — I had that project to keep me going for awhile — I also started doing other forms of freelance writing. I wrote tabloids, and radio ads and TV ads, and that sort of thing for candidates in various states for state-level campaigns. Just a little advertising — that sort of thing.

MICHAEL: *Was this when your work for DC Comics on THE ATOM mini-series and your work on DALGODA began to produce fruit?*

JAN: Right. Getting into DC was ridiculously easy because **Gil Kane**, the artist, had seen my other work and approached me at a convention. He said, "I have this idea for a mini-series for DC." He gave me the idea in 25 words or less, and asked if I'd like to write it. I said, "Yes." There I was.

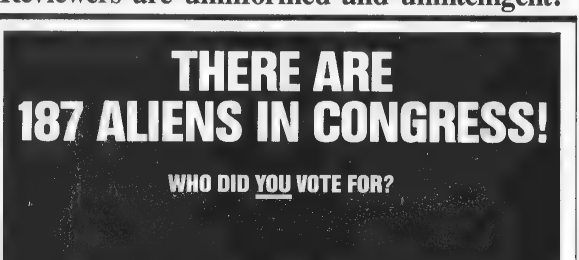
MICHAEL: *What were the beginnings of DALGODA? Did you approach the publisher, Gary Groth, with the idea?*

JAN: I really can't remember how that exactly came together. **Dennis Fujitake** was looking for a project. I was looking for an artist. **Gary Groth** was looking for a project to publish. We all three just came together at the same time. I'm not sure if Gary recommended that Dennis write to me, or how that went.

MICHAEL: *You've been successful in both mainstream newsstand comic books, as well as alternative press or small-press comic books. Of the two, what are the differences?*

JAN: The only independent or alternative

"Reviewers are uninformed and unintelligent."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187 ALIENS IN CONGRESS!
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publisher I've worked with is Fantagraphics. They are very good people to work with, and they place very few demands on me, except to do the very best work I can. They don't dictate story content in any way. Dennis and I just do pretty much what we want with DALGODA right now.

MICHAEL: *Are the major publishers different in this?*

JAN: You get more direction from DC. They need to approve things more along the way. The editors offer more guidance or, in some cases, change things. They have really been pretty good, though, on this point. Mainstream pays a lot better. I've written a couple of Spider-Man stories for Marvel that ended up paying quite well because they pay on a royalty basis — like everyone else — but SPIDER-MAN sells quite well, of course, so I got very good money from that. DC —THE SWORD OF ATOM series — I was very lucky — that sold well. So there's more money with the mainstream publishers. Unless, of course, something happens where the character suddenly gets very big, and they want to make movies, lunch buckets and Underroos. *(Laughter.)* With mainstream, the publisher owns the character, and you get a small percentage. With the independent press, most likely you own the character and you get the lion's share of that kind of money. But the chances of that happening are fairly slim. You just have to make a judgement on your own as to which project you're going to shuffle to which company.

MICHAEL: *If there were one thing in the comics industry that you could change, what would it be?*

JAN: I would widen the distribution to include not just comics shops, but bookstores — simply get more outlets for a wider variety of comic books.

MICHAEL: *What would you change in the working relationship of a writer with a publisher?*

JAN: It's hard to say about any one thing. I would like more of a package approach, where the writer and the artist got together with a production staff that they can all work closely with, and do the book for the publisher, limiting the publisher's involvement in things like finding colorists and letterers and that sort of thing.

MICHAEL: *If there were one established character that you could write, who would that character be — a boyhood favorite?*

JAN: I don't really have one of those. Most of the characters that I like from my childhood have thirty years or fifty years of continuity behind them. Writing Spider-Man was horrible. I love Spider-Man, but he had so much history built up, and so many books coming out — there are three Spider-Man books every month — the writer is really hamstrung with what he can do with character development.

MICHAEL: *If you could do exactly what you wished to do, what would Jan Strnad be doing right now?*

JAN: I'd write novels.

MICHAEL: *Do you think you'll leave the comics industry someday?*

JAN: I don't know. That's very hard to say — what the future holds.

MICHAEL: *Could we talk about criticism in the fan press?*

JAN: As far as other people critiquing my work, there is such a variety of readers that I like to sample a variety of reviewers, to see all sorts of points of view. I know that **Don Thompson** of THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE is going to take a different point of view than someone who writes for THE COMICS JOURNAL.

MICHAEL: *Are these reviews just personal preference, or do you feel they are based on analyzing literary devices and techniques?*

JAN: You get the whole gamut when you talk about reviewers. Some of them, I think, are uninformed and unintelligent. I think these tend not to stay around. They appear in some publication — and vanish again, quickly. But those who do stay around have some sort of consistent viewpoint, some criteria that they use to judge material. I may not agree with it, it may not be what I use, but they probably represent some faction of fandom that it's worth my while to hear from.

MICHAEL: *Do you have a standard by which you judge yourself?*

JAN: That I use? Yes. I look at the very best work being done, and wonder why I'm not doing work that is that good. I'm very critical of the work that I read, very critical of my own material, and that makes it very hard to please myself. In the first six issues of DALGODA, for example, there is one issue that I really like and that I would give an '*A*" to if I were a reviewer. The others, I can easily pick to pieces.

MICHAEL: *Do you have any weaknesses as a writer?*

JAN: Plenty of them. I'm a weak plotter. I'm much more interested in character.

MICHAEL: *Do you see any weaknesses in general in comics writers today?*

JAN: One of the big problems is the limi-

"The audience wants action, action, action."

DALGODA: A successful series with no superhero fight scenes.

© 1984 Jan Strnad/Dennis Fujitake

tation of the continuing story. They are forced into a soap-opera mode instead of telling stories with a definite beginning, middle and ending. Rather than stories that will explore a particular theme, for example, and make a point — it just is a matter of continuing the action issue after issue after issue.

MICHAEL: *Do the long fight scenes with characters spouting dialogue as their teeth are being knocked out damage comics?*

JAN: They're deplorable. There is definitely an audience that wants action, action, action. But it so dominates the medium that it defines comics. When you talk to a publisher or an editor, they will talk about anything that is not super-heroes as being "off-*genre*." There is no such thing as an off-*genre* novel or an off-*genre* movie. But we have off-*genre* comic books, and I think that's horrible.

MICHAEL: *What will you not do in a comic book?*

JAN: I don't know — I've never thought of that. I think of what I want to try to accomplish. I want to —

MICHAEL: *An example. There has been some controversy over children dying in comics. Would you NOT do this?*

JAN: Well, obviously, in "Grimwood's Daughter" — a child died. It's a mercy killing. I think that an arbitrary ruling is ridiculous. A lot depends on what the story requires. Children do die. It's unfortunate, but it happens. I want the reader to be a better person after they read my story. I would like them to use or exercise an emotion. If I can get an emotional response from a reader, I figure I've succeeded in making them aware of some aspect of life that they may not have been aware of before. I would like the readers to recognize in the characters something that they see in people around them. Be more aware or more sensitive — or just feel in a better mood when they finish the story than when they began it.

MICHAEL: *If you could give a word of encouragement to a person just beginning to read comics, what would you tell them to do?*

JAN: Read around. Sample all of the publishers. Never buy a book that they don't like just for a collection. Or because it ties in with some other book. Just buy the material that they enjoy.

MICHAEL: *Is it important for them to read outside of comics as well?*

JAN: Definitely. Any sort of books that they read in addition to comics, I heartily encourage.

MICHAEL: *How do you feel about the future of the comic-book industry?*

JAN: I think that it'll be around. I think that the combination of pictures and words is too powerful to die out.

MICHAEL: *Is there anything that you'd like to say to the readers?*

JAN: I'd like to encourage them to go out to a comic-book shop. Find one, look around, and see the variety of material that's available.

"My greatest success is getting people talk-

PETER DAVID

Although I've written many an introduction for my interviews, both for COMICS INTERVIEW and for MARVEL AGE, I've never gotten used to doing them. If the subject is famous, then readers already know who I'm talking about and why, so repeating things will only insult their intelligence. And if the subject is not famous, then the reader will discover who the poor victim of microphone-phobia is by reading the interview (in these cases, a sometimes painful process for all concerned.)

Truth to tell, even though I hate writing these italicized sentences, the ones in PLAYBOY preceding that publication's interview (which is always about a famous person) are dutifully read word-for-word by yours truly. So, this intro is supposed to give you some sort of idea of what to expect from Peter David, Marvel's Direct Sales Manager and the writer of SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN. Well. . . hell, anyone who keeps a whole fortress of super-hero toys in his office and plays with them (and lets you do the same) on company time, can't be all bad.

At least, I had fun.

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *I am talking with Peter David, the man with two first names, about his work at Marvel — specifically, writing PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, and working in sales. What exactly is your title in the sales department?*

PETER DAVID: Direct sales manager.

DWIGHT: *Direct sales manager, and he just opened with incredible glee, a check for two, count 'em, two cash registers. Why are you so happy about that?*

PETER: Well, because at least one third of our retail base does not have a cash register in the store, something that we feel is absolutely mandatory to being a good retailer. So what we did is offer a program where we offer cash registers to retailers at cost. Retailers have said to us that they can't afford cash registers, so what we're trying to do is make them affordable to the retailers. We buy in quantity, get them at a distributor's discount, and sell at that same discount. Unlike people who sell cash registers for a living, we do not need to mark it up. We sell at our cost, as a service to our retailers. It is a fairly valuable though somewhat ludicrous Marvel retailer program.

DWIGHT: *How long have you been direct sales manager?*

PETER: I've been at Marvel for three years, and I've been direct sales manager for at least one year, now.

DWIGHT: *What have you learned about the comic-book industry during this time?*

PETER: I've found that much of what makes a book a success is how it's perceived by the retailers. If retailers believe that a book is going to be a slow seller, they will order accordingly, and thus create a self-fulfilling prophecy. One of the main aspects of my job is to convince our retailer base and distributor base of a book's merits, and it's not always easy. We have had books that have had incredible market potential, and we have to overcome genuine resistance. We don't always succeed.

DWIGHT: *Can you give me a title?*

PETER: It's no secret that THUNDERCATS was launched with a massive advertising campaign, by the toy company. The comic book came out, and many retailers and distributors, completely missed the boat. Issue #1 was heavily in demand and the books weren't there, because retailers didn't look at the facts. They said, "It's a Star Comic," and they ordered a book with national TV and toy tie-ins as if it were the first issue of TOP DOG. Another example is G.I. JOE. Issue #1 is a fairly sought after book. . . #2

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Peter David
Birth: 23 September 1956 — Ft. Meade, MD
Occupation: Direct Sales Manager, Marvel. Writer
Favorite Foreign Language: Hebrew. Not that I speak it, but I like to hear it.
Famous Last Words: When I was a fan, I said that if I wrote a comic, I'd never kill off a character.
Favorite Food: Double stuff Oreos. But you couldn't tell.

ing about the PETER PARKER book."

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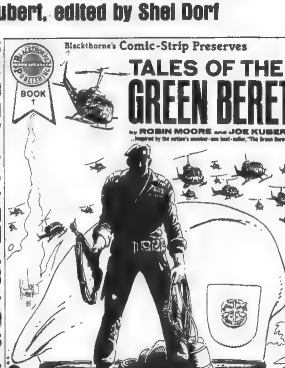

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"Our distributors don't take any guff."

also, since it didn't have the push of being a first issue. And it took retailers a long time to pick up on G.I. JOE, because it was a "toy book," and about the military. Their bias interfered with wise ordering. I would walk into a retail shop and say, "I notice you're out of G.I. JOE, "and the retailer would say "Yes, I've sold out of it," and he would say, "I sold out of it last month." I said, "How many did you order this month?" and he would say, "Five." and I'll say, "How many did you order last month?" and he'll say, "Five." I'd say, "How many are you going to order next month?" and he'd say, "Five."

It's understandable because it's their money that's on the line. These books are sold non-returnable, so they want to be cautious. We never want retailers to throw caution to the winds. But if the retailer doesn't order enough, the readers don't see it, and they may not pick up the next issue.

DWIGHT: *There's been, in the fan press, a lot made about Marvel's seeming monolithic presence — almost that Marvel can act at will and force distributors to do what Marvel wants. Can you respond to these charges? I'm sure you're familiar with what I'm talking about.*

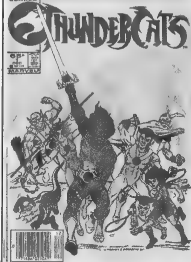
PETER: It is very, very difficult — perhaps impossible — for Marvel to twist anybody's arm to do anything against their will. Our distributors are very independent — very tough-minded. They don't take any guff from anybody. Nor do our retailers. We can ask them to do things, but we certainly can't force anybody to comply with our wishes. How could we?

DWIGHT: *What about people who say that Marvel is publishing a lot of titles that are simply unnecessary?*

PETER: Marvel *is* in the business of publishing comics — of being a full-line publisher. Nobody will complain to Bantam Books that they like their westerns but they don't like their mysteries, so why do they publish mysteries. But people do complain that they don't like everything Marvel publishes. Even worse, among some circles, the feeling is that Marvel shouldn't publish anything this select few doesn't like, and that there is something underhanded about Marvel continuing to publish this material, even if lots of readers love the series.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned that Marvel is a full-line publisher. What do you think are the limitations that Marvel has by being a full-line publisher?*

PETER: The limitation when you're a full-line publisher is that you're not able to please all the people all the time. Back in the early Sixties when Marvel was producing barely a handful of titles, all of which closely interlinked with one another, people who were



THUNDERCATS #1: Did distributors miss the boat?

reading Marvel liked everything Marvel was producing. As Marvel has grown, we now have readers that say, "Well, I don't enjoy all the titles the way I used to, therefore something must be wrong with Marvel." No, Marvel has simply developed and changed with the times, because with any company — not just comic book companies — diversity is the key. We do not want to be constantly recycling the same audience all the time.

DWIGHT: *But an accusation that has been made is that Marvel seems to be recycling a lot of the same plot lines. . .*

PETER: Well, I have a bit of difficulty responding to that simply because I don't want to speak for people in editorial. But I disagree with the concept that all you're going to see is the same old thing. That's what I'm trying to avoid doing in PETER PARKER by deliberately doing things that have never been done before. Besides, doing "the same old thing" might not be such a terrible thing. Every time **John Byrne** gets on a book such as FANTASTIC FOUR or HULK he says that he is going to take the book back to the basics, to analyze what made the book a success when it first came out twenty-five years ago. Such a pronouncement is always greeted, quite rightly, with a great deal of joy. People say, "Good, that's what I enjoyed when I was reading it." So you have, to a certain extent, this dichotomy that people want to read things that seem familiar to them, but on the other hand they want to be surprised. We just try to balance it as best we can.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned what you are doing on PETER PARKER. I'd like to dwell on that a little bit. You said that you are doing things that have never been done with Peter Parker/Spider-Man before.*

PETER: Trying to.

DWIGHT: *What makes Peter David's version of Peter Parker/Spider-Man different from AMAZING and WEB, considering all three have to be quite interelated?*

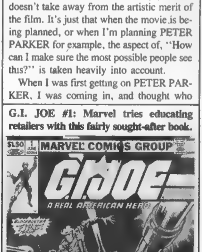
PETER: I'm looking at PETER PARKER, and I want to make it sell, which is understandable. Although I have a writing background, I also have a sales background, and I want to make the book a sales success. The advantage that I think I have is that I have a great deal of sales experience. I go out there, I speak to the retailers, I speak to the distributors. I feel that the unique contribution that I am able to give to PETER PARKER is that I can see from a sales point of view what makes a comic book a success.

DWIGHT: *So you're deliberately playing to your audience?*

PETER: I would say most definitely. Take **Steven Spielberg**, for example. **Steven Spielberg** will deliberately put certain elements into a movie that he knows are guaranteed to make the movie a success. It doesn't mean that the movie has any less quality, doesn't mean that it's any less enjoyable. It doesn't take away from the artistic merit of the film. It's just that when the movie is being planned, or when I'm planning PETER PARKER for example, the aspect of, "How can I make sure the most possible people see this?" is taken heavily into account.

When I was first getting on PETER PARKER, I was coming in, and thought who

G.I. JOE #1: Marvel tries educating retailers with this fairly sought-after book.



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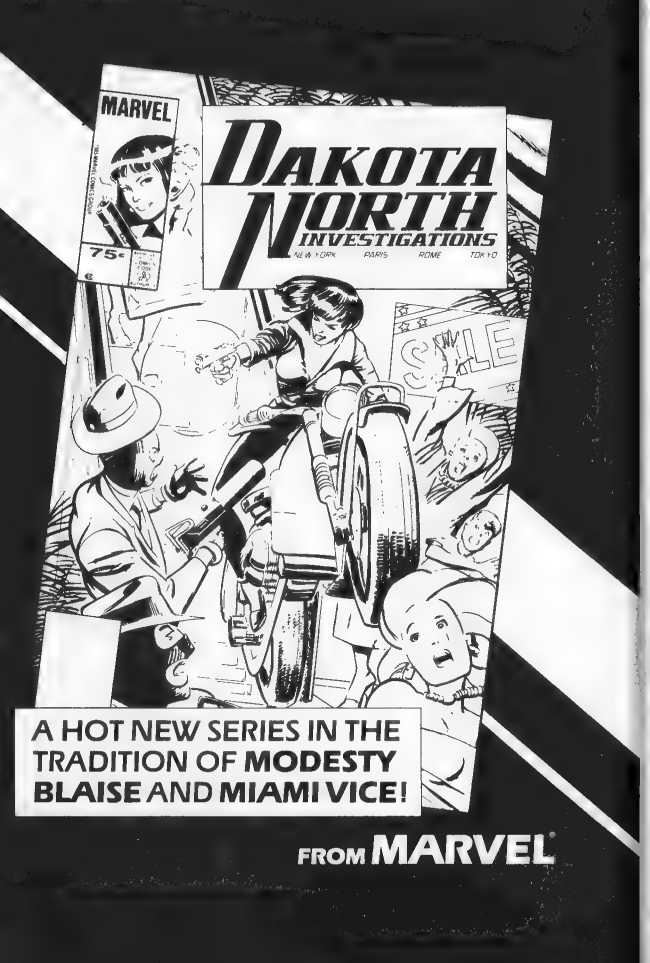
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"Death sells — cold-hearted, but true."

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RIDICULOUS! BESIDES, HOW DO YOU KNOW I'M NOT A MUTANT?
I DON'T, BUT I'M WILLING TO BE YOUR PARTNER ANYWAY.
LISTEN, MORTY, I JUST WENT THE PARTNER ROUTE WITH THE BLACK CAT. IT DIDN'T WORK OUT.
OKAY, BUT COULDN'T YOU TRY ME IN THE BLACK CAT'S PLACE?

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #266, art by Sal Buscema and Joe Rubinstein. "This story cemented my reputation as a writer of funny stories."

knows the name of **Peter David**? My family, so I can be sure that two or three people are going to pick up the book, but no one is going to buy the book on the strength of my name alone. So what I really wanted to do was to introduce storylines that would, from a sales aspect, grab people by the scruff of their necks, shake them and say, "You've got to see this book."

DWIGHT: *That's a good dramatic statement, but can you give us some specifics?*

PETER: Sure. For example, death sells, which may sound incredibly cold-hearted, but it's true. Killing off a character is a major event. So much so that it's almost become a *cliche*. Being aware of that enables me to play off another aspect of what makes a book popular — the unexpected. Fans think they've seen it all, so if I take an issue of PETER PARKER and say, "Not only have you not seen it all, you've barely just begun to see what can happen in a comic book," it's going to grab their attention.

So you analyze — how is death usually handled in a comic book? Usually it happens in one of two ways. Either the comic book says, "In this issue, the death of so-and-so," and it builds up to it, frequently with a double-sized issue, and so-and-so kicks off in the last couple of pages, and has a noble dying speech. Or it's, "Somebody dies in this issue," and it happens at the end and people buy the issue to see who dies, and it becomes a guessing game, and that's not the way death is in real life. My wife would not call up and say, "Peter, somebody died in your family," and I'd say, "My God, Myra, who died?" And she would say, "You have to guess. It's either your aunt, your uncle, or someone else." And it's ludicrous — it doesn't happen that way. So we killed off Jean DeWolff. It's fully advertised as "The Death of Jean DeWolff," although it doesn't say that on the cover. It is the first of a four-parter. When I told readers ahead of time that Jean is dead on page three of the first part of four parts, they were flabbergasted. They said, "Well what are you going to do for the rest of the book, for the rest of the series?"

DWIGHT: *Because they were used to the death being the climax, and you turned it around and made it the catalyst.*

PETER: That's exactly the word I used. It's the catalyst for the events, not the climax in and of itself. All the fans are going, "Oh yeah, someone dies in this issue, I've seen this all before," and when they get to page three, people are going to stop dead, so to speak. *(Laughter.)* Sorry, I couldn't think of any other way to phrase it — are going to be stopped in their tracks...

DWIGHT: *Let's use stopped dead.*

PETER: Stopped dead so to speak, and say, "Whoa, wait a minute. Something is totally, totally different — I haven't seen this before." And that's what we're going for. When you're three pages into a comic book, and you're an older reader particularly, and you say to yourself, "My God, I haven't seen this before!" then that has done its job. From a marketing point of view, from a sales point of view, and from an editorial and creative point of view. You have managed to surprise the people. And I'm just getting started. This is the first three pages.

DWIGHT: *With PETER PARKER, what do you feel has been your greatest success and greatest failure in what you have been attempting?*

PETER: I think my greatest success is that I'm getting people talking about the book. They are talking about it in the comic shops, they're talking about it to me at conventions — they're talking about it. Comic book sales are largely word of mouth from a customer point of view. The comic-book readers trust each other, and if they talk up a book, if they

"My first novel is coming out this year."

hear about it through word of mouth — "Have you checked out what's happening in this book?" — you're most of the way there already. The fans are then getting each other to buy. They are doing the salesman's job to a large extent. I can go out there and say, "This book is great. You should buy it or you're a schmuck," and people say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, but you're from Marvel." I have a great deal of trouble expressing my opinions because people say, "Yeah, yeah, but you're from Marvel."

DWIGHT: *The stigma of your position.*

PETER: Exactly. No matter what you are saying, they figure you must be feeding the company line. But when you do something that grabs the retailer's interest, and by the same token, the older fan's interest, you've got a very influential spokesman on your side. The kids come in, they say, "What's good from a story point of view?" And he's going to point them over to the book that you want him to. My greatest failure — that I'm not selling more immediately. *(Laughter.)* PETER PARKER was undergoing a downward sales slope. We've reversed that now... sales are climbing, largely due to the Jean DeWolff storyline... that, and the excellent art by **Rich Buckler** and **Brett Breeding**. My goal is to make it the best selling Spider-Man book. Take that, **DeFalco**! *(Laughter.)* Actually, **Michelinie** has the best selling, what am I talking about? I'm the weak sister of the group, but we're going to change that. My greatest failure, I think, was that I put a lot of humor into my earlier work — "The Commuter Cometh," "Jump For My Love," and "Compulsion," although it had some serious overtones, was a relatively light story. I put a lot of light things into the Wasp/Paladin two-parter that **Jim Owsley** actually plotted. I think my greatest failure was that I allowed myself to be perceived as someone who only writes humorous stuff.

DWIGHT: *You get typecast very quickly.*

PETER: Very, very, quickly. What you then immediately have to do is — that was another aspect of Jean DeWolff. People read "Commuter" and other stuff, and they would say, "Oh, right. **Peter David**, he's the one that writes the funny Spider-Man stories, and if he's writing PETER PARKER, then we're going to see more funny Spider-Man stories." Well, Jean DeWolff is dead serious. It has humorous moments, because life has humorous moments, but it is not a funny story. So what I feel I'm doing to some extent is fighting the perception that all I write is funny stuff. Because as you said, you get typecast real quickly in this business. So there again was another marketing point of view — that of how I can fight this marketing perception that, "Oh right, Peter writes funny stories." Well, the way to do it is to do a book which grabs people and says, "You thought he writes funny stuff? Read the first three pages and say again that all he writes is humorous things."

DWIGHT: *How did you actually wind up getting PETER PARKER in the first place?*

PETER: It's not a complicated story. I'd always been writing...

DWIGHT: *What did you write?*

PETER: Short stories, fanzine stories, sketches — I've written a hell of a lot of skits that have been performed at various conventions. I wrote an Op-Ed piece for the NEW YORK TIMES that ran last Christmas. I've been writing in some way, shape, or form since the age of six, so it's been an ongoing thing. I also write novels. My first novel is coming out from Berkeley next year. And very simply, I needed to supplement my income, as most writers do. *(Laughter.)* But aside from that, I always liked the character of Spider-Man, and I came up with an idea for a story. The thing was, in the same way as I analyzed what made a book saleable to a retailer, and to the fans, I also said, "What kind of a story can I do that is going to get the attentionof an editor?" And the idea was to present the editor with something he hasn't really seen before. So what I did was come up with "Compulsion," which was based on the **Leopold and Loeb** case of two college students back in the early part of the century who cold-bloodedly killed someone just because they felt they could get away with it. Well, I felt that was a little bit heavy for a Spider-Man story, but what I came up with

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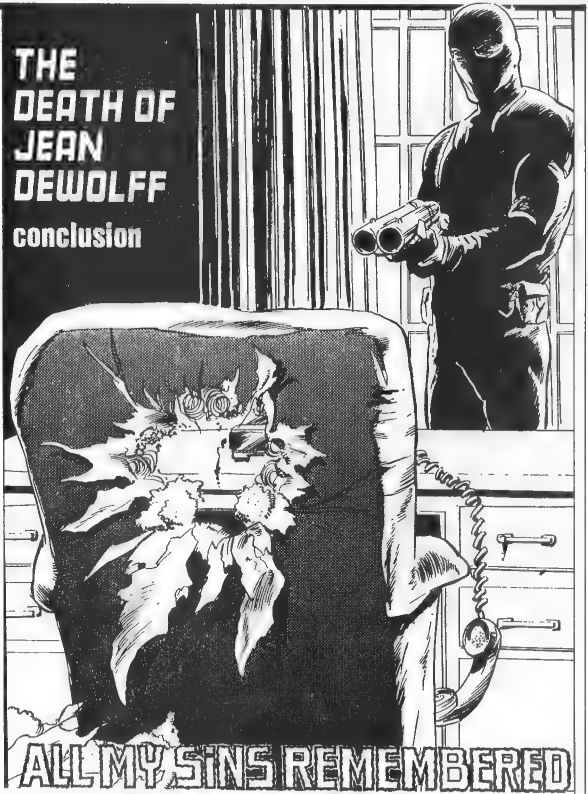
"I wrote an OP-ED for the NEW YORK TIMES."



PETER PARKER #110 revealed a dead serious side of Peter David to comics readers. Art by Buckler and Breeding.

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"My house is like the Bronx Zoo, with a million stuffed animals in it."

was the idea of a couple of college students who decide that what they are going to do is prove how clever they are by pulling the chain of one of the super-powered beings in the Marvel universe. They picked Spider-Man, because everyone picks on Spider-Man. And the twist that I gave to the whole thing was that Spider-Man found out about it and turned the tables on them. I did up the story plot, and **Jim Owsley**, the new Spider-Man editor, read it, and he was completely snookered by the ending — he did not see it coming. Jim's attitude was basically, "Any story that can completely catch me, an old time comic-book reader, so off guard that I didn't see it coming, is something that is worth publishing." So he bought that story. At the same time, he needed some more inventory stories for SPIDER-MAN. That's something he constantly needs. If you're editing any other character, one or two inventory jobs in the drawer, and you're set for the next year, should the regular creative team muff the deadlines. With SPIDER-MAN, if you have three inventory jobs in, and one creative team on each book misses a deadline within three months, then you've wiped out your inventory. So the editor wants to get in as much back up inventory as he can.

So Jim said, "Write me another story." I'm sitting in his office, and he asks if I have an idea for another story. I had various ideas kicking around in my head, but I wanted to do something that would sell to him. I'm speaking of selling specifically to **Jim Owsley**, because it ain't getting to the fans, retailers, or the distributors until Jim goes for it. I looked up on Jim's wall — have you been in **Owsley's** office? He's got this huge picture of **Prince** there. So I said the first thing that came into my mind. I said, "I've got a story about a character who is a lot like **Prince**," and he said, "Great." Naturally, he would say great. That story eventually became "Ace," which was in the PETER PARKER ANNUAL. I think if I had written it five months later, when I had gotten a little more experience, then the story would have been a little bit different. But as it was, I was still very satisfied with it. I then wrote another couple of inventory stories — "The Commuter Cometh," and "Jump For My Love." Much to my subsequent horror, these were then scheduled back-to-back, and that helped cement my reputation as a funny Spider-Man writer. I would have never, ever wanted those stories to appear back-to-back if I had any say in it whatsoever, because it's kind of like a variety show — you don't have two comedians on in a row — you have a comedian, then a singer, then another comedian. But much to my astonishment, the fans did not lynch us. I found that generally people liked one story or the other, but not both, curiously enough — maybe because they appeared back-to-back. I don't know. And when **Al Milgrom** left to do SECRET WARS II, Jim offered PETER PARKER to me. I thought about it for maybe a half a second, and leaped for it, more than happy to That's basically how I wound up writing PETER PARKER.

DWIGHT: *On a completely different subject, what is Peter David, direct sales manager for Marvel, doing with the Super Powers line of toys, and Asterix, and very few Secret Wars characters in his office?*

PETER: No — where the hell did the Secret Wars characters go? There's Cap, and. .there are a few more Marvel ones, but they are inside the fort.

DWIGHT: *Oh, they've been captured — they're being held by Darkseid.*

PETER: That's until Green Arrow managed to get the Rancor Monster, who is only five bucks, which is great.

DWIGHT: *From Star Wars, no less.*

PETER: Yes, absolutely. As you can see, the Rancor Monster is eating Brainiac, and he,s got Steppenwolf in his other claw. I got them because they are nifty-looking toys. I think that Marvel has the best characters, but DC undeniably has the better toys — they do things.

DWIGHT: *The action movement.*

PETER: Exactly. If you squeeze Wolverine's legs, his claws don't pop out — nothing happens.

DWIGHT: *They break.*

PETER: The Kenner toys are really fantastic toys — look at that Darkseid — that Darkseid is fantastic. It's great having a toy that can basically kick the butt of any other toy in the known universe.

DWIGHT: *Literally do so.*

PETER: Well, he waves his arms, his eyes glow. The Rancor Monster is going to be in for some serious trouble if he ever tries to

Ace, from the PETER PARKER ANNUAL #5, a story sale owed to a poster of rockstar Prince.

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"DC undeniably has better toys than Marvel."

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put his claws on Darkseid, because Darkseid can blow him away without a second thought. Darkseid is a great villain. *(Voice calls from outside office.)* Oh okay, I'm easy.

DWIGHT: *He's easy folks! Does your wife know this?*

PETER: But I'm not cheap. *(Laughter.)* I have the Asterix toys because they were a gift from the folks in the sales department — **Carol Kalish**, who is my boss — **Sandy Schechter**, who is my assistant, I don't know if they got **Fred Baumann** to chip in on it or not. *(Laughter.)* They also gave me the fort. I had a banquet table, but we ran out of room, but we're going to set it up again. **Sergio Aragones** came in here and fell in love with the Asterix toys, so we're going to get him some. I collect all of the Super Powers figures. **Al Milgrom** came by one day with his Firestorm figure, and I had it slug it out with my Martian Manhunter figure, which was a very short fight. My Martian Manhunter got within five feet of Firestorm and naturally keeled over immediately. *(Laughter.)* The fascinating thing is that people come in, and they start to play with them, and I will come into my office, and the characters will be different. Green Arrow wasn't perched up there before, and now he is, and he's firing down at the Rancor Monster. It's really dynamite. I love toys. Somebody had a t-shirt that I regretably did not pick up. It said, "The One Who Dies With The Most Toys Wins." My house looks like the Bronx Zoo with a million stuffed animals. I have my own passions — my toys, and animation cels.

DWIGHT: *What is your favorite toy?*

PETER: My stuffed Opus. He's my traveling companion. When I go on the road, I usually take him with me. *(Laughter.)* He's great. I bought him when they first came out. My wife had made me promise no more stuffed animals — this was the first of many times she made me promise this — naturally I totally ignored it. I was in Toys-R-Us, and I saw Opus sitting there and I did a double take. I took him over to my wife, and I said, "I'm getting Opus." And she said, "All right, you're getting Opus." *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *What to you was the worst period in comics?*

PETER: I stopped reading comics around the age of thirteen or fourteen because I would be standing in a candy store, with my comics and there would be the seven-year-olds with theirs, and the people would look at me like I was some kind of drooling idiot. *(Laughter.)* But I don't like people I am giving money to looking at me like that. I figure that at the very least, I am giving them money, and they owe me the courtesy of treating me like a human being. So I stopped buying comics for several years. It was not until I hit college age — that was very staggering to me. I'd stopped reading SPIDERMAN around issue #120, and several years later I ran into a friend who was still reading comics, and I said, "So what's happening with Spider-Man? Did Peter Parker finally marry Gwen?" And he said, "Gwen's dead." And I went "GASP," and I said, "How did she die?" and he said, "the Green Goblin dropped her off a bridge," and I said, "That's no fun, my God, *I'd* never kill off a character if *I* wrote a comic." It was also pretty bad during the time when comic books — I think it was Marvel at the time, unfortunately — were printing the pages so that there was an ad in the lower half of the middle pages instead of story being there. I hated that.

DWIGHT: *Everybody did.*

PETER: I'm on common ground. There was also a period where covers were like little framed boxes, and I wasn't too wild about that. The DC implosion did not do too much for me either, because there were a number of titles that I was getting interested in, and since that time I was getting back into comics, it was really kind of annoying to have some of the books that were pulling my interest unceremoniously hacked off. So those were not great times, but I'm sure they are not unique to me.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned conventions — do you have a favorite convention?*

PETER: I would probably say that my favorite is the Heroes Convention in Charlotte, NC — the most recent one because that was the first time I have gone down and my stories had started to hit, and kids were coming up and asking for my autograph. You've got to understand something. I've

"Jim Owsley was convinced that this speech by Stan Carter fairly screamed at the reader that Stan was actually the Sin-Eater. Considering we were flooded with letters telling us what a great guy Stan Carter is, virtually no one picked up on it." From P.P. #107.

"Doing 'the same old thing' might not be so terrible."

been in direct sales for several years, and kids would come up to me at conventions and they would see my name badge and it would say "Marvel Comics," and they would ask, "What do you do?" I'd say, "I sell the comics, I'm in direct sales." The most positive response I would get from that is, "Well, I guess I'll get your autograph anyway." Which is fine. I got used to that. Like — O.K. fine, this is my lot in life, I can take it. Leave the glory to the **Chris Claremonts** and the **John Byrnes** and everybody else — I'm more than content to just go around and do my business in direct sales. When I was in North Carolina, kids were coming up to me asking me for my autograph, and acting as if I were doing them a favor, and that really blew my mind.

DWIGHT: *Back to your writing for a second — what is the most embarrassing thing you ever wrote into a story? One where, after the fact, you went, "Ohhh, I wrote that?"*

PETER: There was a sequence that I wrote into a story that embarrassed and chagrined me so much, that I actually lobbied and managed to get **Owsley** to change it. In "Jump For My Love," I had a bunch of guys come into a comic-book store, and knock the place over because there was a lot of money in the cash register because SECRET WARS was on sale. *(Laughter.)* I scripted it, and when I got back the black and white, I looked at it and said, "My God, I must be out of my mind." There are going to be retailers all over the country who are going to lynch me for putting that idea into the minds of the huge public at large. I went in and cried on **Owsley's** shoulder for a week — he loved the idea — he thought the bit was great. Everybody was buying SECRET WARS, kids were there, there was a lot of money, the robbers were there, they said, "Don't you know what week this is? It's SECRET WARS week." Peter Parker happened to be coming in because he was going to buy SECRET WARS. *(Laughter.)* It was a running balloon where everybody was going, "It's SECRET WARS week." That is why there was so much money there. And I realized I would be doing a tremendous disservice to the retailers and alienate the very people I wanted to get on my side. So that's why I actually got it changed to a general magazine store, and Peter Parker was coming in to buy a TV GUIDE, and that kind of thing — much to my relief, and I never heard anybody complain about it.

DWIGHT: *Because they didn't know about it.*

PETER: Right.

DWIGHT: *What are your long-term goals, for Peter Parker and for Peter David?*

PETER: My plans for the book are on several levels. From a storytelling aspect, I want to keep people guessing. I might have two issues in a row that revolve largely around character interaction, and just when readers think there's never any action, follow with an issue of page-to-page slugout. But a slugout with an eye towards the realistic consequences of such actions, as we did in the Jean DeWolff storyline with the crowd getting injured, or Spider-Man nearly killing the Sin-Eater.

I have a number of themes I want to work with. Child Abuse, for one, except that my handling will revolve around the difficulties that sometimes arise when such charges are made. Not much publicity has been given to that. I'll also be dealing with prejudice and the difficulties mixed marriages have in society, by bringing back Joe Robertson's son, Randy, who is now married to a lovely young white woman, who Joe takes an instant dislike to. Part of what made Spider-Man work, particularly in the early days, was the emphasis on stories with family relationships. I want to get back to that. As far as opponents go, Spider-Man will be encountering the Mauler, in a fight where the reader may well wind up rooting for the Mauler. Spidey'll be fighting Sabretooth with a wonderfully sadistic climax to that fight. And I'll be introducing the Foreigner, who I deliberately wanted to look like **Patrick McGoohan**. I gave **Rich Buckler** photo reference from THE PRISONER, and he captured him beautifully. The Foreigner is the world's greatest assassin — he's so good that 37 law enforcement agencies swear he doesn't exist. He's so good that the people he's assassinated, you don't even know they've been killed. **Alfred Hitchcock** once defined a perfect murder — it's happening right now, and you'll never know about it. That's why it's perfect. The Foreigner commits perfect murders.

The Foreigner will tie in with an extended storyline involving the Black Cat. Every time I told people I was bringing back the Cat, they'd moan, until I described what I had planned. Then they couldn't wait to see it. The Cat was always at her best when she was an unknown quantity. Spider-Man is going to think the Cat's on his side. The Foreigner is going to think the Cat's on his side. The only one who's going to know for sure is the Cat, and she's not telling.

"I still can't believe we got away with this!" P.P. #110, based on the Leopold-Loeb case. ***Deja vu?*** **If you can't place it, check our next issue.**

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"You get typecast quickly in this business."

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Stan Carter's apology cannot keep SPIDEY from delivering the most requested pounding in comics history. From P.P. #110.

DWIGHT: *Is she going to go back to being a criminal?*

PETER: Wait and see. As for Spider-Man himself, I want to play him as someone who's really getting frustrated. Peter's been at this for a number of years now. Protecting innocents, using his power responsibly. And yet innocent people have died, despite his power. The bad guys are still around, keep coming back. It has to start wearing on him. It ties in with the gritty, HILL-STREET-BLUES feel we're giving the book. Peter's getting angrier and angrier, but at the same time he's feeling more and more hamstrung by circumstances that are beyond his control. Eventually, we'll bring back Stan Carter, the Sin-Eater, and Spidey will see just what his power unleashed can do. In PETER PARKER #110, he beat the crap out of Stan, no-holds-barred. He did not hold back. And when we see Stan again, he'll be showing the effects of such a beating. He won't talk right, or walk right, and Spidey'll be horrified by what he's done, while at the same time secretly glad, and he'll feel guilty about feeling glad.

As for my goals as Direct Sales Manager, I'll continue working with retailers to help them expand their business, and work with distributors to widen the audience and improve ordering procedures. I'm developing a new reorder program, that will give distributors the ability to reorder round-the-clock, in smaller increments than before and for less money. Accessibility of additional copies is part of what has made Marvel the top seller. Distributors claim that when they want more copies of DC titles they have difficulty getting them — they ask me if *I* can get them more TEEN TITANS. But they know that at Marvel we're always working to benefit them. We're first with reorder programs, co-op advertising... we're the leaders in retailer services. And we're going to keep it that way.

And of course, there's always my ultimate ambition...

DWIGHT: *Which is?*

PETER: To have a rest stop on the Jersey Turnpike named after me. It'd be great if a family is driving along, and the kid's in the back seat moaning, "I gotta go," and the parents say, "Hold on just another few minutes. **Peter David's** only a few more miles."

"I see myself primarily as a storyteller,

BRENT ANDERSON

Brent Anderson is a man proud to be working in the comic-book industry. His skill as an artist was obtained by hard work — long hours at the drawing board. He is constantly growing and accepting new challenges

A new Marvel series called STRIKEFORCE: MORITURI written by Peter B Gillis, about a band of mortally doomed superheroes, will be graced by Brent's pencils, as will an up-coming Moon Knight episode in MARVEL FANFARE, and a 47-page s.f. project called "The Spacing Dutchman", for Continuity Publishing.

To give something back to the industry he loves, Brent conducts comic art workshops at conventions. They are quite popular with aspiring artists on their way up.

You'll find him open and relaxed as he talks about his career...

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Brent Eric Anderson
Born: 15 June 1955, San Jose, CA
Occupation: Storyteller
Training: Self-learned; and Jim "Smitty" Smythe to show me what I learned wrong.

Credits: KA-ZAR THE SAVAGE, X-MEN GRAPHIC NOVEL, assorted inventory and fill-in Marvel jobs, SOMERSET HOLMES for Bruce Jones Associates and Pacific Comics.

Favorite Movies (by genre): 1. (Satire) DR. STRANGELOVE: OR HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB. 2. (Humor) PLAY IT AGAIN SAM/THE PRODUCERS. 3. (Pseudo-biography) CITIZEN KANE. 4. (Suspense) REAR WINDOW/NORTH BY NORTHWEST. 5. (Western) SHANE. 6. (Dark humor) HAROLD AND MAUDE. 7. and many more too numerous to mention.

Favorite Comics: 1. (Past) FANTASTIC FOUR by Kirby (Natch!), 2. (Present) GROO THE WANDERER and LOVE AND ROCKETS. 3. and finding more all the time.

Favorite Artists: Anyone who draws anything well — there's thousands of them!

Pet Peeve: No time to view my video movie library or read all my books!

SHEL DORF: *Brent, what was the lowest point in your career?*

BRENT ANDERSON: Go for the easy ones! *(Laughter.)* The *lowest* point in my career?

SHEL: *The absolute lowest.*

BRENT: It was after my initial stint in New York in 1976. I went there with **Frank Cirocco**, **Gary Winnick** and **Tony Salmons** to break into comics and stayed about six months. I did a 17-page sample — you don't get paid for doing samples on spec — trying to get work. I finally did a five-page story for Marvel that took five weeks to pencil, and an eight-page love story for DC that never saw print. So I figured out that I wasn't fast enough. I was not good enough to draw for comics professionally. I just couldn't make enough money at it. At $35 a page, I made $35 a week doing that five-page story. So, the lowest point was

rather than an artist or a writer."

"I did the X-MEN graphic novel."

coming home after that, after realizing that I wasn't going to take comics by storm. I spent about three months living with my parents and feeling sorry for myself. Then I saw STAR WARS. It turned me around and I started studying again. I went back in 1979 and made a career out of it.

SHEL: *What was the highest point in your career? Have you reached it yet?*

BRENT: I don't know. I don't think I've reached it. My career has been made up of little highs — one step after another.

SHEL: *At what point did you realize that you had succeeded beyond your earliest expectations?*

BRENT: In retrospect, I look back and everything is going according to the game plan. I set a general goal of what I wanted to achieve, not necessarily *when* — without a timetable. Things have just been going, like a natural progression, from one thing to another. I did one-shot stories for Marvel and then I did KA-ZAR for a while. People got to know who I was. I did the X-MEN GRAPHIC NOVEL, which was fairly successful and SOMERSET HOLMES which was almost total creative freedom to do what I wanted to do. Now I'm in the position of taking what I want to do to almost anybody and possibly selling it.

SHEL: *You said earlier that the reason you failed at Marvel was not because of lack of skill, but because of the speed you were working?*

BRENT: No, I *didn't* have the skill, that's why I failed. I *thought* I did. I was not having the facility to put it down the first time you envision it. I didn't have the skill to do that. I had to work everything out. I still do that to a point, but I'm capable of doing it quicker now.

SHEL: *Did you figure this out for yourself or did you have other New York pros tell you this?*

BRENT: I pretty much figured it out for myself. Marvel and DC were both giving me work at the time. The work I did was acceptable to them. All they had were good things to say about it. But, I knew inwardly that I wasn't drawing fast enough. The pressures of the deadline were really pointing out my shortcomings as an artist. I had to correct that before I could even attempt the kinds of comics I wanted to do.

SHEL: *How did STAR WARS turn your thinking around?*

BRENT: From about the holidays through March in that year, I didn't do anything. I got a job through a friend ripping up old carpets and tile to make a little extra spending money. As far as art went, I did nothing, absolutely nothing. Then I figured I had to get out of that drudgery. Actually it wasn't drudgery — it was good for me to turn my brain off and use my body. Physical exertion rather than mental exertion. I was in no mood to think. Then I got into a studio with **Frank Cirocco** and **Gary Winnick**, Horizon Zero Graphics.

SHEL: *What were they doing in their studio?*

BRENT: They were basically relying on some of the things they had learned while working at Continuity Associates. They worked with **Neal Adams** for six months and learned how to do storyboards, motion boards and commercial art. They opened a commercial art studio, which Frank still maintains in San Jose, doing a lot of work for Atari. Frank and Gary started the studio in 1977. I rented a table, but I wasn't doing much work. I did some commercial work now and again, but my heart wasn't in it. I was doing it to pay the rent. I worked for a local magazine in the area, PENNINSULA MAGAZINE — I was doing spot illustrations for articles. The owner had a friend who published a suburban horse-owner's magazine and they wanted something a little different. So I drew a sample comic strip of a city kid and a ranch kid who meet every summer when the city kid goes to work on the dude ranch. It was sort of "The Hardy Boys on a Dude Ranch." He liked the artwork, but wanted it to be more suburban, so I turned it into a kid with his horse and a sister. She rides English saddle, he rides Western. It was a one-page gag strip. My heart started going back into writing and drawing comic books. This was a couple of months before STAR WARS. I knew about the movie because **Howard Chaykin** had gotten movie stills the previous summer in order to draw the comic book. It looked great, so we were first in line to see this new movie. It looked so neat in the stills. Needless to say, during the movie, my jaw hung open. I left the theatre with a glazed look on my face. I thought about it for awhile. I thought, gee, if these guys can make a movie like this, with this much inspiration, talent, and application of ability, then what am I doing moping around here? That turned me around mentally. I thought, I have to get to work. I have to study — get in on this creative thing that people are doing now.

SHEL: *What was your approach to study? Did you design your own creative program — did you go to art school?*

BRENT: Through a friend I found a teacher who worked at Foothill Junior College in Mountain View — **Jim Smythe**. All the stu-

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"It's *essential* to learn classical anatomy."

dents called him Smitty. He was probably the greatest influence on my development as an artist. He was a classicist. He taught classical anatomy, classical perspective, color theory, composition, everything. He would say his feet were firmly planted in the 17th Century — working his way back to the 16th!

SHEL: *A lot of teachers don't really have that kind of attitude, do they?*

BRENT: I never ran into anyone before him.

SHEL: *No, they think they're being very modern by teaching distortion. It's nice that you ran into this teacher of classical anatomy.*

BRENT: It's *essential* to learn those things. If you don't learn them at the outset, you're going to have to try to learn them as you go along — that's a hundred times more difficult. It's like trying to build a house and the foundation at the same time. You can't. It's impossible. And if you do manage to do it, then the house is not very strong.

SHEL: *Did you have an attitude about what you hadn't seen on the comics pages which you thought* should *be there?*

BRENT: I saw a lot of the same storytelling over and over again. The same shots of people doing things, and that bothered me. It seemed to me that a lot more drama could be pulled out of a comic-book story than just a lot of hitting or people screaming at each other. There's a lot more drama to life than that and it's oversimplified in most comics. I discovered all those qualities of drama from movies. Movies have a lot of subtlety and drama and storytelling. The way a cinematographer will light a set adds or subtracts from the drama.

SHEL: *By following movie techniques you made your storytelling as clear as it could be?*

BRENT: I apply some movie techniques to comics rather than try to literally translate them. Some movie techniques work in comics. Some comics techniques work in movies. But not all techniques are interchangeable. There have to be some adaptations made from one to the other. It is those adaptations that have added to the drama of my work, as opposed to someone who doesn't use those techniques.

SHEL: *There came a point when you went back to New York with new samples?*

BRENT: In 1979, I studied two years under Smitty — then I went back to New York. But this time I sort of knew the ropes and I knew what kind of material the companies were looking for. And I had done SADDLE-TALES, the name of the strip in the horse magazines — for a little over two years.

SHEL: *Are people impressed by printed samples?*

Contessa Valarie de Samarre, from THE SPACING DUTCHMAN, a series Brent is preparing for Continuity.

© 1985 Brent Anderson

BRENT ANDERSON

"ROMITA said my women had too many curves."

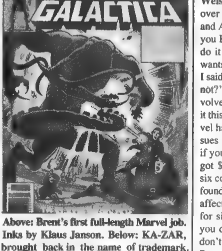
BRENT: Not necessarily. At least not in comics. They want to see if you're a professional. The samples I took to New York consisted of a couple of pages from SADDLETALES to show my inking ability and my storytelling, and to say — look, I *wrote* these, too. I had no intention of getting in as a writer, but if you go into a comics company saying that you're just a penciller, that's where they'll put you. To become an inker or anything else becomes more difficult. I wanted to go in as "Jack-of-all-trades" — to be able to color, pencil, ink, maybe even write. So the samples I took were more professional samples than I had a few years previously.

SHEL: *Who did you show them to?*

BRENT: In 1979? I guess **John Romita, Sr.** He was acting as art director.

SHEL: *After seeing your samples, did he have an assignment for you?*

BRENT: He didn't have an assignment for me. His only comment was that I had to simplify the way I drew women — that the women I drew were too much like life drawings. Too many bumps and curves on them. They had to be simplified and sleeked out — made more commercial looking. Very perfect. More perfect than life. **Sandy Plunkett** got the same spiel. The two of us talked about it and said, yeah, he's probably right. After that I did two fill-in issues — one of BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, which was the very first full-length story I did for Marvel — the second one was a DR. STRANGE inventory, which didn't see print for about a year and a half. It was kept in inventory until they needed it. The BATTLESTAR GALACTICA was also in inventory, and just about that time **Louise Jones Simonson** was hired by Marvel as an editor. She was checking out her inventory to get her schedule started and came across the story I had pencilled. She liked it enough that she thought of me when they told her they wanted to bring KA-ZAR back for merchandising reasons. It seems every seven years they have to protect the copyright, or the trademark of both Ka-Zar and Shanna the She-Devil, so they decided to bring them both back in one book. They gave it to Louise to find an artist and a writer for. She had brought **Bruce Jones** over from Warren because they were friends and had worked together, and when she saw my BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, she thought let's give this guy a shot. I said, "Well, I don't think I want to do a regular series." Even then I had the fear of deadlines.



Above: Brent's first full-length Marvel job. Inks by Klaus Janson. Below: KA-ZAR, brought back in the name of trademark.

SHEL: *Didn't this mean big money to you, though?*

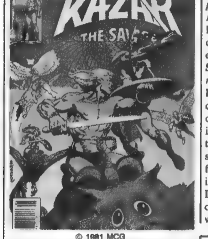
BRENT: It didn't matter.

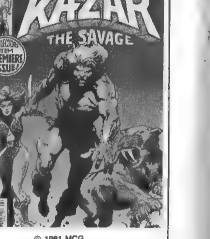
SHEL: *The money didn't matter at this point? Were you independently wealthy, Brent?*

BRENT: No. But I felt I could make a decent enough living doing fill-in issues — enough to pay the rent and be happy.

SHEL: *So you didn't want the stress of regular deadlines?*

BRENT: Like I said, three years before, I could barely do a story, let alone a series on a deadline. So I was really hesitant to do it and I told her as much. I said, "I don't think I want to do a regular series." She said, "It's not scheduled yet. We haven't found a writer or an artist for it yet. I'm asking **Bruce Jones** if he wants to write it." I'd never met **Bruce Jones**, but I'd heard of him. I said, "Let me think about it." So we went out to dinner — it was sort of a Marvel dinner party. **Jim Shooter**, once in awhile, would take out a bunch of people to a local restaurant that he enjoyed. **Alan Weiss** was there and sat down and chatted over dinner. Afterward, we were walking, and Alan said, "I heard that Louise offered you KA-ZAR. She asked me if I wanted to do it and I told her I couldn't. She really wants you to do it. Are you going to do it?" I said, "I don't think so." He asked, "Why not?" And I said, "I don't want to get involved with a series." He said, "Look at it this way." I should explain here that Marvel had an incentive plan. If you did six issues in a row, you got a $500 bonus. And if you did six more, making it twelve, you got $1000. And then you got $1000 after six consecutive issues following that. They found that consistency with the creative team affected sales. So Alan said, "Look, do it for six months, get the $500, then split if you don't want to continue it." I said, "I don't know, seventeen pages a month, huh? Boy, I don't know if I can do that." I thought about it for two days. I talked to my roommate about it and, in the end, I finally talked myself into it. I called Weezie at home that night, after two days of deliberation, but she wasn't there. I went in the next day. I was really anxious to tell her I wanted to do it, because I was afraid she was going to give it to somebody else. I walked into the offices and said, "I think I can handle seventeen pages a month." That's when she told me the book had gone up to *twenty-two* pages a month! *(Laughter.)* So, I had a minute-and-a-half to think if I still wanted to do it. Finally, I told her, "Heck, I get to draw dinosaurs, Shanna, and Zabu." Ka-Zar didn't interest me that much as an art challenge — he's just another jungle hero — but the other three elements did. Also,





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"For 12 issues, you got a $1,000 bonus."

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I called **Bruce Jones** and talked to him. He was a very interesting person, very creative, and really up on the whole idea of doing the **Edgar Rice Burroughs**-type of thing. I said, "Hey, let's go with it." So I did. My fears eventually came true, which is why I quit the book later. The deadline was getting to be a lot of pressure.

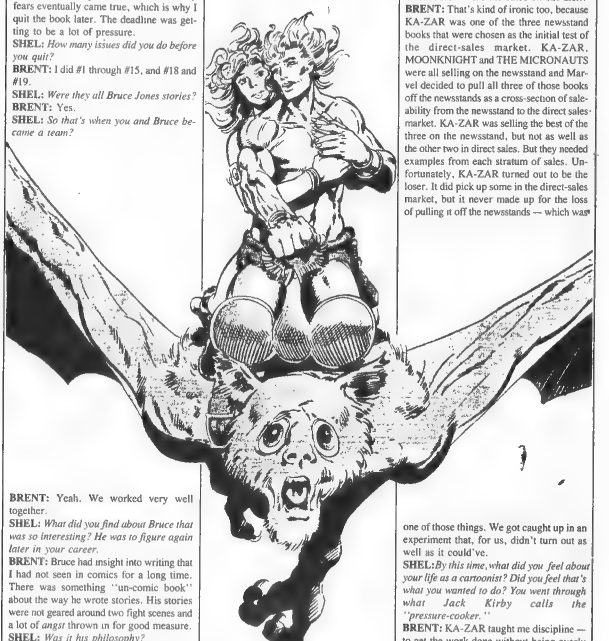
SHEL: *How many issues did you do before you quit?*

BRENT: I did #1 through #15, and #18 and #19.

SHEL: *Were they all Bruce Jones stories?*

BRENT: Yes.

SHEL: *So that's when you and Bruce became a team?*



BRENT: Yeah. We worked very well together.

SHEL: *What did you find about Bruce that was so interesting? He was to figure again later in your career.*

BRENT: Bruce had insight into writing that I had not seen in comics for a long time. There was something "un-comic book" about the way he wrote stories. His stories were not geared around two fight scenes and a lot of *angst* thrown in for good measure.

SHEL: *Was it his philosophy?*

BRENT: A lot of that came through, yeah. I'm sure like all good writers, Bruce drew on his own experiences, from his own life. This is what gave life to Ka-Zar. For as much of a dunderhead as Ka-Zar was in the stories, I'm sure those are probably things Bruce lived and learned from — he was just putting it back into a character to give it life.

Writers do that all the time. They're constantly taking things from their own lives and applying them to fictional conglomerates or aggregates of people they've known.

SHEL: *How were the sales on KA-ZAR?*

BRENT: That's kind of ironic too, because KA-ZAR was one of the three newsstand books that were chosen as the initial test of the direct-sales market. KA-ZAR, MOONKNIGHT and THE MICRONAUTS were all selling on the newsstand and Marvel decided to pull all three of those books off the newsstands as a cross-section of saleability from the newsstand to the direct sales market. KA-ZAR was selling the best of the three on the newsstand, but not as well as the other two in direct sales. But they needed examples from each stratum of sales. Unfortunately, KA-ZAR turned out to be the loser. It did pick up some in the direct-sales market, but it never made up for the loss of pulling it off the newsstands — which was one of those things. We got caught up in an experiment that, for us, didn't turn out as well as it could've.

SHEL: *By this time, what did you feel about your life as a cartoonist? Did you feel that's what you wanted to do? You went through what Jack Kirby calls the "pressure-cooker."*

BRENT: KA-ZAR taught me discipline — to get the work done without being overly concerned with the finished product. The lack of quality in the finished product is what eventually drove me away from it. It was the first series I ever did, and the first deadline situation I ever had. Even though I would turn pages in to **Weezie Jones**, and she would say, "These are great, these are wonderful," I would say, "I don't like

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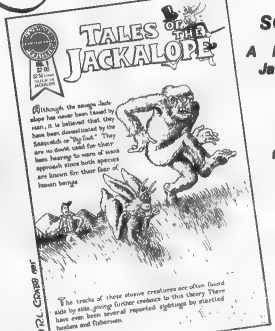
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"SHOOTER would take us to a local restaurant."

them, Weez. They look bad. Unfinished. They're not polished." She'd say, "It's all here. The storytelling's here. Everything." She gave me some great pep talks. It was because of working with Bruce and for Weezie that I stayed with it longer than those first six issues. They are good people to work with and I felt that I learned something from them. But eventually the work was compromised to the point where I just couldn't produce it anymore and feel good about it. I was making decent money, but it still wasn't appealing to me. I had to quit and go on to something else.

SHEL: *What did you go on to from that point?*

BRENT: Remember what I said about the different steps happening? Well, very strangely, but very nice for me, every step was a progression to something higher. The next step, obviously, was the X-MEN graphic novel. The way that came about was rather funny. I went into the office, finally fed up with the deadlines on KA-ZAR and I had to put in my notice. I had to tell Weezie that I really didn't want to quit, but I felt I wasn't producing good work. I wasn't feeling good about it, I just had to get out of doing the series. She said, "Okay. I understand. We'll find somebody else to do the book. Don't feel bad about it, you did good work." She was trying to make me feel better. Weezie was editing the X-MEN at the same time she was editing KA-ZAR. A half hour later I walked into Weezie's office. **Chris Claremont** was there. They were talking, and Chris said to me as I walked in, "**Cockrum** just quit the X-MEN. Do you want to do X-MEN?" *(Laughter.)* And I'm thinking, "Great — Marvel's top-selling book. Here's my opportunity to take on the X-MEN and make myself rich and famous all in one fell swoop." But I couldn't justify taking on the X-MEN for the same reasons I had just quit KA-ZAR. They were compounded reasons for the X-MEN has what — seven or eight main characters? KA-ZAR only had three. I would be doubling my problem if I were to take on the X-MEN. I couldn't justify it to myself for any reason other than the money. I turned him down. He said, "I didn't really expect you to take me up on the offer. Weezie told me about the reasons you left KA-ZAR. So how would you like to do a graphic novel with the X-Men?" I said, "Heck, that's a one-shot deal — there's a light at the end of *that* tunnel."

SHEL: *Was there more money in doing a graphic novel than a regular comic book?*

BRENT: There was in the X-MEN graphic novel. The next best thing to doing the X-MEN monthly was the graphic novel. I couldn't make much more money penciling a year's worth of the regular X-MEN book.

I did sixty-two pencil-and-ink pages. About four months work — about one-fourth of doing the series for a year. I made more money than I would have, if I'd just done four months of the X-MEN. But it was one project — one job. It wasn't a continuing month-after-month grind with no light at the end of the tunnel. Because of subplots, you never feel like you've finished anything. That's what I needed at that point — to do something I could feel I'd finished. It was a complete package. It could stand on its own. It didn't rely on fourteen other books to give it weight, to give it drama. It was dramatic within itself.

SHEL: *The X-MEN graphic novel has become the center of a controversy involving the 700 CLUB, which is a religious television show. What exactly was the content of this graphic novel?*

BRENT: It concerned the abuse of the media by a television minister who feels compelled to destroy mutants because of something that happened in his past. He's basically a crazy person who's abusing the medium of television. The basic message of the whole story was to "think for yourself." Don't let other people think for you because, often times, they're not right in the way they think. As far as I was concerned, when I drew the book, it was not an anti-religious

"We got a letter from the Sherlockian Society ask-

Bigotry, mutant style, from the Claremont/Anderson X-MEN GRAPHIC NOVEL, a book that incurred the wrath of a religious TV show.

statement, whatsoever. It was a comment on abuses of the television — but we took a lot of flak from the 700 CLUB because a lot of things were taken out of context.

SHEL: *In other words, the 700 CLUB can't, in their wildest imagination, come to believe that a psychotic reverend would be able to get on television. Is that it?*

BRENT: I don't think they saw him as psychotic, which is kind of scary. *(Laughter.)* They just saw him as a television minister who was being abused by sub-human creatures. And the sub-human creatures were oftentimes not those in the comics, but those *producing* the comics.

SHEL: *They can't conceive of a religious figure who could get carried away?*

BRENT: I don't think so. They saw the Stryker character as a twisted version of the gospel — which is exactly what he was. But they didn't recognize the message it had. They saw it as a personal attack, saying that all ministers, and all ministries, are twisted. That wasn't the intent of the story whatsoever.

SHEL: *Leonard Starr once told me in an interview when he was writing ON STAGE that all doctors and all lawyers are beyond criticism, and that there can't possibly be a corrupt doctor or corrupt lawyer. When he wrote one into the script, he got letters saying, "How dare you profane my profession?" I guess that's what happened with the 700 CLUB as well.*

BRENT: I would say so. Yes, that we were defaming their profession. *(Laughter.)*

SHEL: *Yet the basic idea of thinking for yourself is, to me, an All-American idea.*

BRENT: The 700 CLUB made the comment that all of our forefathers believed in God, and that it's evident in all the writings and all the documents. It's even on money — "In God We Trust." But what they failed to point out was that our forefathers also had the wisdom of separating Church from State. It's just narrow-minded thinking on the part of people who attack comics, in general, and the graphic novel, specifically. They didn't even read the story. They didn't do any kind of homework for their attack. So it's narrow-minded ignorance that bothers me most. It's not religion. I have nothing against religion whatsoever. I respect people for believing in something, believing in right! But I don't have any respect for ignorance, for narrow-minded thinking. It restricts the capabilities of human beings to improve themselves from within.

SHEL: *Also, one of the beefs was that they thought your were corrupting children. Do you feel that children were corrupted by this X-MEN book?*

BRENT: No. *(Laughter.)*

SHEL: *Brent, while you were doing KA-ZAR, were you living in Manhattan?*

BRENT: I lived in Manhattan for two weeks in 1976, which was enough, thank you. No, I lived in Mamaroneck, New York, which is about 35 or 40 minutes by train from Grand Central Station. I lived there for a couple of years and then moved up to Westport, Connecticut, which has always been an artist's haven.

SHEL: *Yes. This is where Leonard Starr and Stan Drake share a studio. Mort Walker lives there and, I think Rick Marschall.*

BRENT: **Chiodo** and I got a good deal on an apartment there. It was a converted garage behind a house in Westport.

SHEL: *Joe Chiodo?*

ARE WE NOW TO LET THOSE WHO PUT FORWARD THE PROPOSITION THAT WE ARE DESCENDED FROM APES TELL US THAT OUR DESCENDENTS-- OUR CHILDREN -- WILL BE BORN MONSTERS?! AND THAT THIS IS NATURAL?!?
I SAY, NO! I SAY, NEVER!
WE ARE AS GOD MADE US! ANY DEVIATION FROM THAT SACRED TEMPLATE -- ANY MUTATION -- COMES NOT FROM HEAVEN, BUT HELL!

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ing if Somerset Holmes was related to Sherlock."

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BRENT: Yeah. He's a painter and an illustrator. We were roommates for about four and a half years. He was my traveling companion in 1979 when I went out to New York.

SHEL: *Did you commute into New York very often?*

BRENT: Maybe three times a week, at least twice a month. Depended on how much work I had.

SHEL: *What did you like about living in Westport?*

BRENT: The fact that it was on the back of all those comic books I grew up with — The Famous Artist's School in Westport Connecticut. *(Laughter.)* I had to live there so I could put it in my biography, right? No, one of my reasons for moving up there was that **Bill Sienkiewicz** lived there. We were toying with the idea of getting a studio together, which we ultimately did. Also, people like **Stan Drake** and **Leonard Starr** were there. It was a nice little community. A bit on the snobbish side, I guess, but it was nice. It's always good to be around other artists, especially those that work in the same business.

SHEL: *Did you find yourself going next door for — instead of a cup of sugar — a file full of jungle animals? An artist's morgue is pretty important, isn't it?*

BRENT: Yeah, they have one of the greatest artist's morgues in the world because all the old illustrators who died there left their morgue files to the library. God, that sounds terrible, doesn't it?! I just got the image in my head of the Westport Public Library showcasing the stuffed remains of the Famous Artists School teaching faculty and keeping their bodies on file! Anyway ... the library has about thirty or forty file cabinets full of photos dating back from the Thirties all the way up to, the mid-Sixties.

SHEL: *That's marvelous.*

BRENT: And they're constantly updating it. They have people that work in the library that tear up any magazine two years or older and add it to the morgue folders. It's an invaluable system. **Sienkiewicz** uses it all the time. I even sent some reference to **Al Williamson** in Pennsylvania, but don't tell the library!

SHEL: *Should we explain the term "artist's morgue?"*

BRENT: It's a photographic file of pictures of things: animals, people, cars, trucks, buses, landscapes, mountain scenes. It's a system of filing these photographs. Also, you can keep a filing system of art styles: cartooning, illustration techniques, painting technique, and so forth. It's basically a reference system.

SHEL: *Let's take an example of how you would use this reference system. The writer has his character suddenly take a boat to a rubber plantation. He doesn't know exactly what a rubber plantation looks like. So you look under South America or someplace in NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC and get a picture of one, right?*

BRENT: Right. NATIONAL GEOGRAPHICs are excellent reference.

SHEL: *You get all your references before you start the story?*

BRENT: If you've smart and you want to add some realism to your work. Most people don't know what a rubber plantation looks like anyway. So you can fake it and no one will know the difference — except someone who worked on a rubber plantation. The point is, that comics should entertain, but they should also be instructional — to a point.

When I was a kid, I liked things to be right.. Something that bothered me about **Jack Kirby** comics, like the FANTASTIC FOUR, was that his drawings of New York City didn't look like New York City. They didn't look like the buildings I had seen in photographs. It bothered me a little that it was an analogous city like Metropolis or something. I always liked the instructional part about comics as well as the entertaining part. As an adult, as an entertainer, I like to try to instruct. If I'm going to show something, I try my best to find out what it really looks like, so that some kid could point it out and say "See, that's what that looks like."

Remember the old DC Comics like THE FLASH? When the story read something like, "then the Flash ran at incredible speed, approaching the speed of light," there was an asterisk, and at the bottom, it said, "186,000 miles per second — Editor." When I was in school and they asked me that question, I knew the answer. Nobody else did. I got it from a comic.

SHEL: *When you were living in Westport, did you have an opportunity to go by and visit some of these top cartoonist's studios?*

BRENT: Yeah. **Stan Drake** and **Leonard Starr's**. That was a great thrill. **Bill Sienkiewicz** had known Stan for awhile. He had shown them some samples and he kept saying, "Come on up, we'll go meet Stan." **Stan Drake** to me was like, wow, **STAN DRAKE**. **Gary Winnick** was a big **Stan Drake** fan — I would look at the work Gary had collected. Stan was one of the major influences on **Neal Adams'** work. That's the way I've learned about art — to work from one artist back to his influences — back, back. Meeting **Stan Drake** was, to me, a pretty big deal — to have him like my work Well, I really didn't have any work at that point that I was proud enough of to show him. It wasn't 'til SOMERSET HOLMES #1 came out, that I really had anything I wanted to show him. I had met him at the local restaurant where he and Leonard would go to eat lunch. I'd seen them there. He'd call me over to sit and chat. We became friendly without him having seen any of my artwork. He didn't know me from Adam — but he was still a very pleasant person.

SHEL: *He's a charmer — had-fellow-well-met-type of guy.*

BRENT: When he finally saw the first issue of SOMERSET HOLMES, he and Leonard lavished great praise upon it, said it was wonderful. I had the sneaking suspicion that they didn't want to hurt my feelings because we had already established ourselves as friends.

SHEL: *Did you reach a point where they could criticize you without hurting your feelings?*

BRENT: Yes.

SHEL: *And then what did they say about it?*

BRENT: They said it was wonderful, *(Laughter.)* So I guess they must've liked it.

SHEL: *How did SOMERSET HOLMES get started?*

BRENT: I finished the X-MEN graphic novel in October or November of '82. I went home for the holidays, for Christmas. When I got home, I got a call from Bruce. We had kept in contact even though I had quit KAZAR, because we became fast friends. I'd

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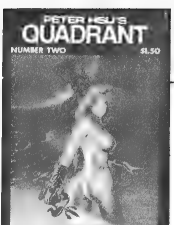

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"People said it was like a HITCHCOCK movie."

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always talked about doing Modesty Blaise. MODESTY BLAISE was to me a great strip as well as a great series of novels because the stories dealt with a lot of human feelings, a lot of character traits that spy novels, at least the few I've read, just didn't. It was a female lead-character that was very believable to me. I enjoyed the adventure. Bruce and I talked about that at great length — if we ever got back together, we'd do a MODESTY BLAISE-type thing. He said, "Do you want to do a series together? We're packaging books for Pacific Comics and it'd be a good opportunity to create a new character." It would be the two of us, doing what we couldn't do on KA-ZAR, having creative freedom to do whatever we wanted to do.

SHEL: *Was there more creative freedom at Pacific as opposed to Marvel?*

BRENT: Maybe a bit. This was prior to the Epic Comics line, so there were no creator-owner properties, except in EPIC MAGAZINE. There was really no way we could do a romantic adventure story in EPIC MAGAZINE — it wasn't the place for it. Bruce had become sort of jaded working for Marvel, having worked on KA-ZAR for so long, and having to work within the Marvel framework. He wanted to build a working rapport with Pacific Comics. He thought this was a good opportunity for the two of us. I said, "Great, wonderful. We'll do that." I stopped in Kansas City on the way to my folks' place in California for the holidays. It was only the third time I had met Bruce. The first two times were in New York. He had come on Marvel's tab to talk over plots.

SHEL: *All this time Bruce was writing comics, he remained in Kansas City?*

BRENT: Right. I worked with Bruce on six issues before I ever met him face-to-face — we'd become friends on the phone. The first

© 1983 Bruce Jones, Assoc /Brent Anderson

time I met him, we took to each other instantly. Anyway, I stopped over in Kansas City to talk over doing a series with him. It never went any further than that. I had just finished the graphic novel. I was in the middle of working on something else, and wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Also, I wanted to wait and see about Pacific's stability. I didn't want to jump right into a new comics company. I wanted to see how they'd do before I made any commitments.

SHEL: *That's understandable. Was the name for the character chosen yet? It's a very intriguing name, Somerset Holmes — it's like two familiar names: Somerset Maugham and Sherlock Holmes. Whose brainchild was the name?*

BRENT: I don't know. We talked over doing a Modesty Blaise-type character. We ran into two problems. One was, if we made it too much like Modesty Blaise, it would just be a poor-man's Modesty Blaise and if we intentionally avoided doing anything like Modesty Blaise, it would weaken our character. We had to start from a whole new standpoint. We had to make our character unique unto herself. The inspiration was Modesty Blaise, but she couldn't *be* Modesty Blaise. Okay, her name. We'd come up with the idea of an amnesiac who is seeking her past, as well as trying to avoid her persecutors. I wanted to do an adventure-love story, a romance-adventure thriller *ala* **Hitchcock**. To me, the name "Somerset" conjured up a nebulous but very romantic image — like a romance novel. "Somerset." "Somerset in Evening." Whatever. My original idea was just to call the book SOMERSET — at least the first issue, so that no one would know going into it what it was. Is this a soap opera? Is it a book about a town in New Jersey? What is "Somerset?" We talked about that for a little bit. Then came the idea. I don't remember who came up with the idea, but between the three of us, we discussed how she got her last name. I had read somewhere about a character who couldn't remember their name. What happened was Somerset sees a billboard ad, or a neon sign that says "Somersetsomething."

SHEL: *You just said the three of us. Who is the third person?*

BRENT: April Campbell. April and Bruce had been writing KA-ZAR stories together since about issue four.

SHEL: *She lives in Kansas City also?*

BRENT: She did then. April was the packager and the editor of SOMERSET. Ultimately, she became the model for Somerset. Anybody who's seen April and the comic book knows that. Between the three of us, we decided she would see her name on a billboard. Somerset Homes.

SHEL: *A holsing-development project.*

BRENT: Right. The idea for that was dictated by homes, the closest thing to Holmes. "Somerset Holmes" sounded good. It sounded confusing to people. Bruce and April actually got a letter after the first issue came out from the Sherlockian Society asking if Somerset was a fictional character related in any way to Sherlock Holmes. They wanted to know the data on her so that they could add it to the Sherlockian archives!

SHEL: *Isn't that fascinating?*

BRENT: We got a letter from **Larry Holmes'** mother, who wanted to know... *(Laughter.)* The longer we used the name, the more we realized how intriguing it was.

SHEL: *What was the first sales reaction to the book?*

BRENT: Very positive. Actually very positive throughout the entire run. I guess people recognized it as being unique in comics — it was like no other comic on the stands.

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"SOMERSET HOLMES was a 3-person collaboration."

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SOMERSET HOLMES #6. Conclusion of the Jones/Anderson tribute to Hitch.

SHEL: *You certainly achieved your goal. As I read them, I felt I was watching a Hitchcock movie.*

BRENT: We got that response from several sources. It made us feel that we'd done something right. Enough people said that it reminded them of a **Hitchcock** movie, that we felt like we had translated not only the storyline, but the visuals from a **Hitchcock**-type movie into comic-book form — at least enough for people to recognize it.

SHEL: *Did you have story conferences with Bruce, or were these all your decisions at the board about the visuals?*

BRENT: It was supposed to be a bimonthly book.

BRENT: The three of us would sit and discuss the plot — we really got into it. We had some real slam-bang action. I would come up with an idea based on something April said. Then Bruce would say, "That's good, but I think we should go in this direction." We'd discuss that direction. Then we'd go back to April's original comment. Then Bruce would disagree with her evaluation of the character and I would defend April's position because she's a woman, and she understands the woman's side of Somerset. The three of us formed a triangle in plot discussions, but when we finished plotting, all three of us felt we had been through a ringer. Plotting books was a give-and-take situation. That's why I can't honestly say who thought of what. It really was a three-person collaboration for the entire series.

SHEL: *You put some very unique touches into some of the panels, Brent. Can you explain your thinking behind it? One sequence is when Somerset is in a cheap New York hotel room, and the neon sign outside the room is flashing on and off. You reflect that in the coloring. Very nice touches.*

BRENT: That wasn't quite as successful as I wanted it to be, but I'm glad it came across.

SHEL: *What other bits and pieces can you remember adding to the visuals?*

BRENT: The final confrontation between the antagonist and Somerset Holmes on some rooftops in pouring rain was difficult. Aside from a couple of pages of flashback sequences, I had nothing to draw but rain and, as interesting as what they were saying may have been, I felt it needed something else — to break up those constant panel-to-panel shots of just rain falling on people's heads. I threw in a couple of flashing lights. There's a green light off to one side, and a flashing red light off to the other. If you look at the panels in sequence, the red light flashes on and off, illuminating Mason's face in one panel and not in another. You see a long shot with the light on and another long shot, two panels removed, with the light off. So it's sort of a visual cue that there are things going on other than just the rain falling.

SHEL: *When I read through those panels of steady rain, it may have seemed monotonous to you, but it created a mood — I could actually hear the rain. I developed that sense of sound through the visuals.*

BRENT: That coloring, the flashing lights, was not just to alleviate the boredom for me, but also to accentuate what was being said. In old theatre, they used to use a green under-light, to depict death, or to depict when Death walked into the room to take someone out. The symbol for Death was a green spot. The red light was to add emphasis to words. I timed the panels, the flashing on and off of the red light, to coincide with the dialogue that was being said in the panels. You can notice who is saying what when the red light flashes on accentuating what's being said. It was an experiment.

SHEL: *Very effective. How did you learn so much about stagecraft?*

BRENT: I watched movies. I read books. As a kid, I'd go to the library and check out any book on the making of movies. They wouldn't talk specifically about set direction, but I knew what upstage was, what downstage was. I knew that in order to tell as much story as possible in the shortest amount of time, you had to compact things. A stage really doesn't look realistic when you stand on it, but through the camera's eye, it looks realistic. I think the same goes for comics. Everything has to seem right. It doesn't necessarily have to be right. A case in point — if you ever watch an old movie and the phone rings — the character picks it up and starts talking to somebody on the other side of the phone. He says, "Hello, this is Bill. No I can't come over tomorrow. No, I told you, I can't come over tomorrow." There's really no time inbet-

Somerset's pursuer takes his proverbial Hitchcockian fall.

© 1983 Bruce Jones, Assoc./Brent Anderson

"SHARON GLESS from CAGNEY AND LACEY

ween the dialogue for the character on the other end of the line to form complete sentences. But if the actor on our side of the telephone was to leave enough space, it would be tedius. You have to condense the time. You get from his dialogue a sense that there is a full conversation going on.

SHEL: *A time-frame reference.*

BRENT: Right. The only criticism I got pertaining to that, was from one person who said that the cinematic approach was good as far as it went, but that I shouldn't have relied so much on it. And relied more on comic-book techniques.

SHEL: *I disagree.*

BRENT: But the point is: I used cinematic techniques where possible. And where they weren't possible, I used comic-book techniques.

SHEL: *That's what SOMERSET HOLMES was about. You said that the original concept was to make a Hitchcock-type comic book.*

BRENT: It's very common in the comic-book industry to discuss camera angles, to talk in terms of cinema when you talk about comics. There are equations between the two.

SHEL: *Oh, yes. It works the other way too. When John Landis was shooting Michael Jackson's video THRILLER, our pal Dave Stevens did the storyboards. Landis composed his shots from Dave's storyboards, placing the people, the camera angle and everything from the camera angles that Dave had laid out. Here's a case where a movie was influenced by drawings as a normal process. Do you think there's a purist approach to a comic book and a purist's approach to a film?*

BRENT: No, they always influence one another. I just saw a movie the other night with you, THE TERMINATOR, which was just one great comics shot after another. You could have framed that film into an extremely exciting comic-book story. It would have been great. As I watch a movie, I break it down into what can and can't work in a comic. I do the same when I read a comic. I read and say, "How would I shoot this? How would I do this differently to get more impact of it?" I'm constantly analyzing and cross-referencing the two mediums.

SHEL: *You and Bruce have worked together for a long time. How much stage direction does he give you.*

BRENT: Bruce gives me none. He told me that I'm the easiest artist he's ever had the opportunity to work with. We're both of a like mind in the sense that we both love movies. We both like the *same* kinds of movies. When he talks about a scene in a movie that I haven't seen, I listen with rapt attention and draw the same conclusions from his descriptions as I would have if I had seen it myself. The same goes for when I draw a sequence in a comic book — he can oftentimes pick up where I got a particular sequence. If not, he'll ask me where I got it, and I'll mention the movie; if he hasn't seen it, he can pick up from my visuals the way the shot would have been done in the film. With like minds, we'd plot the stories out, then I would draw them. During the plotting sessions, I would say, "Look, this is my reason for doing this plot element in the story," and then I'd describe, panel-by-panel, the visual breakdown of a given scene. I would describe it in such a way that it would seem so striking to Bruce, he'd say, "We've got to have that in here." The visuals were an influence in the plotting sessions based on my ability to sell them.

SHEL: *Now that all six books are out, it's almost like wanting to see your favorite movie over again. I'm going to go back and read all six — in one sitting.*

BRENT: I haven't done that yet.

SHEL: *I'd like to see more adventures with SOMERSET HOLMES. Are there any in the works?*

BRENT: The character has been optioned by a movie producer. Ed Pressman Productions has bought the rights to do SOMERSET HOLMES as a movie. Bruce and April have been hired to do the screenplay, and they're now working on the second draft.

SHEL: *Are you going to do the storyboards?*

BRENT: April tells me the director is extremely interested in having me work with him on it. That would be a wonderful experience for me.

SHEL: *I hope it happens for you.*

BRENT: Yeah, but I have no interest in making a career in Hollywood. I would use this opportunity as merely a way of seeing how a movie is made from the inside out. From what I've seen and heard of Hollywood, I have no intention of becoming a part of that mess. I think I'll stay in comics, thank you.

SHEL: *In comics you don't have to work with a committee, do you?*

BRENT: In this it was a committee of three, but usually you have good control over your projects — whereas in moviemaking, you'd probably have to give it up to the director, and perhaps even the editor. Comics are very similar to film in that respect. The two industries are comparable, but comics is on a smaller scale. I am to comics what **Spielberg** is to movies. He can take a property that he wants to do to a studio and say, "I'd like to make a movie of this." Based on his

Pacific Beach, California, 1985. Brent, moments before the world's largest sandcastle (according to the GUINESS RECORDS BOOK) was wiped out.

Photo by Shel Dorf

© 1984 Bruce Jones, Assoc./Brent Anderson

would be perfect as Somerset Holmes."

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track record, he can more than likely sell them on the idea of financing this movie. On a much smaller scale, I think I'm in a similar position in comics. I can take a good, saleable product to one of the companies and possibly sell them on the idea. It's like being a big fish in a little tiny pool.

SHEL: *Sounds like a good place to be. Is April going to play Somerset in the movie?*

BRENT: Over her dead body. *(Laughter.)*

SHEL: *Why?*

BRENT: She wants no part of being in front of the camera. She'd rather be behind the camera, she likes that aspect of moviemaking. Well, I put my vote in every time I talk to Bruce and April for **Sharon Gless** from CAGNY AND LACEY. I think **Sharon Giess** would be perfect as SOMERSET HOLMES. I hope this gets into the interview; let people read about it and start the **Sharon Gless** fan club. But April was a model and an actress at one point. She recognized the limitations on a person. The airheaded model is more than just a myth. There are a lot of airheaded people who are models in the industry. She wanted to have nothing more to do with that side.

SHEL: *Is there a life beyond SOMERSET?*

BRENT: There better be. *(Laughter.)* SOMERSET HOLMES, because of the irregularity of my schedule and due to some of the internal problems at Pacific Comics, didn't come out as often as it should have and it lost a lot of momentum. The sales on it were not what we figured. So, it was more or less a labor of love, as it turned out. If the movie deal goes through, it will ultimately have been worth it. But now, I'm currently back working for Marvel, doing fill-in issues. I'm pretty much the unofficial fill-in artist of POWER PACK.

SHEL: *Can you tell me something about that?*

BRENT: I'm the semi-official fill-in artist on POWER PACK to give **June Brigman** breathing space in her work schedule through the year. This year, for me, is going to be a "one-shot year." I'm going to be doing one-shot stories. I'm working on a MOON KNIGHT story for MARVEL FANFARE, which is about thirty pages long and will be one complete issue. It's the next best thing to a mini-graphic novel

SHEL: *You're very interested in people, aren't you?*

BRENT: People are great.

SHEL: *And you're very positively interested — very tolerant and open.*

BRENT: I like watching people, their reactions to things, how they deal with things — everybody from the President of the United States to the bag-lady down the street and all those in between. Cultures and everything. I believe that human nature is the same throughout the entire world. All exactly the same.

SHEL: *Really? You don't mean that.*

BRENT: Oh sure. Cultural *mores* are the only difference.

SHEL: *A barbarian that rides a horse and swings a sword values life the way you do?*

BRENT: I wouldn't say he values life the way I do, because we're from two different backgrounds. Life to him is something different than it is to me.

SHEL: *Wait a minute. If you were writing that character, you would not write him as if he was like everybody else.*

BRENT: That's true. But raised in our culture, his human nature would have been the same. If I was raised in his culture, mine would have been the same as his.

SHEL: *Maybe it's time to define human nature.*

BRENT: Oh God. I really can't. The force behind a story is the conflict. Conflict is confined to exposing someone with a problem.

Composition in black, from SOMERSET HOLMES — a blend of film and comics technique.

"I'm to comics what SPIELBERG is to movies."

Based on what we've been talking about, if you took a barbarian from one of the Mongol hordes, one of Attila's Huns, and plopped him down in the middle of New York City in 1986, you'd have a conflict. A real conflict. That's taking a science fiction approach — which obviously can't happen. But let's toy with the idea. What if it did? What kind of conflict would there be? You'd have a Mongol barbarian with his 12th Century culture place in a 20th Century American city. You're going to have problems! What will those problems be? That's where human nature comes in. He's going to react with the same fear, the same primal apprehensions and questions as I would if I was transported back to 12th Century Eurasia. What would my conflict be?

SHEL: *Mark Twain found that an interesting concept when he wrote A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT. How long have you consciously been a student of human nature?*

BRENT: Consciously?

SHEL: *Yes. Many artists are very monastic types. They're in their own company a lot — they're not very good with people. They're not comfortable with people and don't have a chance of being students of human nature.*

BRENT: I think, consciously, since my first trip to New York. I felt culture shock. I was sort of sequestered in California, and as far as I knew, that's the way the whole world lived. I would see NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, or hear stories on the news, the way other people live. That's only television. Until you actually get out and experience other lifestyles, your mind doesn't really turn on to the possibility that they really exist. So it wasn't until the culture shock of moving to New York, that I started to see that there is a definite difference between the lifestyles of the East and the West coasts. But the human nature was the same. People reacted to similar situations exactly the same, no matter whether they were on the East coast or on the West coast.

SHEL: *You're not living in Westport, Connecticut, now. You're living in Pacific Beach, which is a suburb of San Diego, California. Since you've moved here, it seems the Brent Anderson studio has become a gathering place for other artists. Is that what you had in mind?*

BRENT: I like company when I work. I like studio situations. When I had the studio with **Joe Chiodo** and **Bill Sienkiewicz**, I really enjoyed the interaction. I think artists do

— EXTRA!

SHEL: *Why don't we touch briefly on what happens in your head when you approach a blank piece of paper.*

BRENT: Stark, raving terror. *(Laughter.)*

SHEL: *Let's get the thought processes. Now, you have a script right at your elbow, what's the first thing you do?*

BRENT: If I've got some inspiration or I've got a piece of paper to tell me what to do, then there is no terror.

SHEL: *Why don't I give you a story right now? I'll tell you what I want on a page. You tell me how you would draw it.*

BRENT: Okay.

SHEL: *We see two figures, running in the night, being chased by a car. They suddenly drop out of sight. These figures are in the countryside. How would you draw this?*

BRENT: Is it a contemporary scene or a period piece? Is it a '30s car or present?

SHEL: *Let's make it a '30s car.*

BRENT: The '30s automatically conjures up *film noir* to me. Dark shadows, overpowering, shadowy shapes, things like that. If it's two people being chased through a countryside, I'd have to know why they're being chased. The reader doesn't have to know why, but I have to know why in order to draw it, to give subconcious moods and impressions to the reader. I have to know the meaning of the event in order to — are you familiar with a thing called foreshadowing? It's where you write a particular passage, foreshadowing something that is going to happen later in the story. I use that a lot when I draw. That determines my angles, the mood, the feeling that I want to give in a particular scene. A simple scene like that, can be drawn in a thousand different ways.

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"CHIODO and I lived in a converted garage."

much better if they're with other artists. The idea of reaching out and finding other artists in the area with similar interests, can only benefit all the people involved. Since I have a fairly good-sized apartment and some space to work with, it seemed like a logical thing to do — to invite people over to work or watch tapes.

SHEL: *Watching tapes can also be a very handy tool to anyone who's in an illustrative medium. How do movies affect you?*

BRENT: Start with the premise that I see myself primarily as a storyteller rather than artist or a writer — I'm a storyteller. Movies are stories. I like to study movies — the way facts and information are revealed throughout the storyline, the structure of the story. I like to analyze that. When I see a movie the first time I don't analyze it. I go and sit in the theatre and accept everything that is thrown at me from the screen and try to get into its world — to accept everything as true and just absorb it. If I get involved with the movie, I'll see it a second time. If, for some reason, during the first viewing the movie makers keep reminding me through bad storytelling, bad editing, bad music, bad screenplay, bad acting, or whatever, that it's a movie, then odds are I won't go see it again. But if it got me caught up in it, and I got into the characters, cried when they cried, and laughed when they laughed, then I'll see it again. A recent movie that comes to mind is THE BIG CHILL. I really got involved with the characters in that movie. The analysis of the moviemaking is just another element beyond the enjoyment of it — I want to know *why* I enjoyed the movie. Also, through analysis I can see the weak points that, for reasons of subjectivity, I didn't see the first time through — plot problems and minor lapses of logic — that I subconsciously avoided as unimportant, just so I could stay involved with the movie. When I analyze a movie, I see its strengths and its weaknesses for what they are and hopefully learn from them. I do that with every film I go see.

SHEL: *That answers it. I'll see you again in ten years and maybe by then you'll be directing movies.*

BRENT: Yeah. Who knows? Video junkets are *definitely* on my horizon — I just need to make more money to afford them!

IMPROMPTU PLOT SESSION WITH BRENT

SHEL: *Let's say it's a young man and a young girl running. The girl's father is a farmer in a truck going after them because they've told him they're running away to get married — and he's against it. So they run from the farmhouse and he gets in his truck and comes after them.*

BRENT: That sets the scene.

SHEL: *Suddenly they drop out of sight.*

BRENT: That's the cliffhanger at the bottom of the page, I take it. First you establish the two people walking at the side of the road. Maybe the girl's looking furtively behind them. It's a moonlit night, full moon behind them — full moon always conjures up weirdness in people. Like werewolves, people act crazy with a full moon out. Anyway, they're furtively walking down the road and maybe the guy's carrying a small suitcase so that you know that they're running from something — little visual clues in the establishing shot. Next shot, the two talk. She's worried about running away from her father. He's trying to console her, saying everything will be okay, they'll be married and her father can't do anything about it. A third panel and you see headlights behind them *ala* the opening of SOMERSET HOLMES. You see some headlights coming down the road. She sees them. She just knows it's her father coming to get them. Instead of running down the road, they jump a small ditch into a field, and the truck follows them. Then you see a close-up. I'm putting a lot of panels on this one page, but it could be a two or three page sequence. Anyway, you see the truck start to chase them across the field. Then I would cut to a close-up of the interior of the truck with the father's face underlit demonically from the dashboard lights with a look on his face like they're not going to get away with this — adding an element of menace to the scene. And then another long shot of them stopping at the edge of something, looking back as the headlights catch them. Then they drop out of sight. Maybe the last panel could be the truck screeching up to the point where they dropped out of sight. So he's just caught up to them, but you don't know where they went. You do know he's right behind them. You want to turn the page to go to the next panel.

SHEL: *So far, the farmer is the villain. But I didn't tell you that sitting next to the farmer is the State policeman who's come with an APB and a wanted poster which has this guy's picture on it. Actually, he's a mass murderer and the father is setting ou with State policeman to save the girl! All of a sudden, I've changed the story completely.*

BRENT: Right. And therein resides drama. *(Laughter.)* Those are the kinds of stories I love to draw. So if anybody has stories like that and wants me to draw them — I'm a sucker for those.

"ZONE" BY MIKE KRAIGER
"ENIGMA FUNNIES" BY GARY FIELDS
"THE HOLO BROTHERS" BY JIM ROHN
"BOB MERCENARY" BY JAY GELDHOF
and
DAVE HARRISON
BROUGHT TO YOU BY
FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS
THREAT!

"I did art for the HEAVY METAL movie."

ANGUS McKIE

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Angus McKie
Occupation: Writer, artist, colorist, animator, designer, publisher.
Born: 1951, Newcastle-upon-Tyne — N.E. England.
Residence: Not far from where I was born.
Credits: SO BEAUTIFUL AND SO DANGEROUS, EXPERIMENT WITH THE AIRPUMP, COMIC TALES, EITHER/OR COMICS, and numerous pieces of illustration and advertising work.
Favorite Movie: BUILD MY GALLOWS HIGH
Favorite Author: Oscar Wilde
Favorite Color: Phthalocyanine Blue
Favorite Quote: "The World is a comedy to those who think, and a tragedy to those who feel."
Pet Peeve: Not being able to create the World in five days.

Much is made of the current British invasion of American comics, but there have been others who have crossed the Great Pond in the past. One such writer/artist is Angus McKie whose SO BEAUTIFUL AND SO DANGEROUS was a high-point of the early issues of HEAVY METAL. This interview with Angus took place in his studio in the far reaches of Northern England. Just to make sure that we didn't make any mistakes or leave anything out, we were overseen by his six-month-old daughter Amy, art critic and mistress of the tilted-headed smile.

Angus McKie in his studio.

Photo by Angus McKie

"I do illustration, animation, print-

DAVE WEIR: *Let's start by talking about the strip that you are working on at the moment, which is — ?*

ANGUS McKIE: A comic strip called THE GOTTERDAMMERUNG GIG. That will be the title as the words appear in the comic strip. They are part of the actual drawings. Titles are always a problem when you're an English artist working for publication abroad Obviously, there's no problem if you're trying to get published in America, but if you're trying for a foreign country it can be awkward. In fact, in one comic strip I solved it by putting the title in Latin, so that would make it alien to all countries, taking away the need to translate — unless you want to know what it's all about, that is.

DAVE: *What's the theme of the strip?*

ANGUS: It's almost like, "Whatever happened to the ideas that were current in the Sixties?" It's based on a plot written by **Mike Feeney**, who has done stuff with me before. Mike's about my age — I suppose he's a year or two younger. He tends to remember the golden years of his youth. *(Laughter.)*

DAVE: *A displaced hippie?*

ANGUS: I don't see how you could say that he's a displaced hippie. If he's a year or two younger than me then he's going to be too young to have been a hippie. I was too young to have been a hippie. Too young to be a hippie and too old to be a punk! *(Laughter.)* There was a lot about being a hippie that I didn't like, but there was a lot that I did like. The only thing that I didn't like about being a punk was that it had this "art school" trendy background. It was a confusing mixture of "street credibility" — I suppose the phrase is — and *avant garde* fashion which was something that came out of the art schools. Punk was supposed to have started in some bondage clothes shops where people like **Johnny Rotten** used to hang out; it then got wrapped up with the art schools pretty quickly and became something for the fashion-conscious art student. The kids who didn't do it knowingly — who just did it — that was quite interesting. In a sense, I was an observer of punk, an observer of hippies. To a certain extent, some of the impetus behind them was about a similar thing — protest — and you could say that there's a strong element of that in this strip.

DAVE: *How do you set about doing a comic strip?*

ANGUS: What I get from Mike is usually a plot with bits of dialogue here and there. Basically, it's a plot. On top of that, I add things that I think would be of more interest to me, because when you're creating something, I think that you're just creating it for yourself. If you're not doing it for yourself, you can't expect other people to take an interest. A lot of the things that Mike is interested in, I'm interested in. There are things in his plots that he has thought of that I couldn't have come up with, but that I'm interested in. Electronics is one of his areas of interest, so there are often references to that.

DAVE: *Such as in POWER TO THE PEOPLE?*

ANGUS: Yes. That's what you want from other people, isn't it? You want them to suggest ideas that you wouldn't have thought of, but once you see them you recognize them as being interesting.

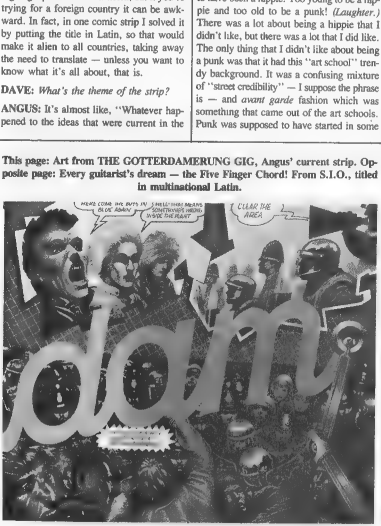
DAVE: *So who decides on the final dialogue?*

ANGUS: Most of that is written by me, but it's within a structure that he has worked out We don't physically work together, though — he just gives me his ideas on paper and then I take them away. The only form in which we work together is what comes out on paper. I don't think that I could physically work with anyone. I don't know, some people can do that.

DAVE: *You prefer to work in isolation?*

ANGUS: Some friends and myself did have a brainstorming session last night, writing some funny captions for some photographs of Amy. I always thought that it would be possible to write a humorous strip by hav-

This page: Art from THE GOTTERDAMERUNG GIG, Angus' current strip. Opposite page: Every guitarist's dream — the Five Finger Chord! From S.I.O., titled in multinational Latin.



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ing, graphics, all sorts of things."

© 1986 McKie

ing brainstorming sessions with people, but I've never done it. I don't know why not — it just hasn't happened. Although I work alone, I'm always "borrowing" ideas. You get ideas from all sorts of things — sitting reading the paper or watching television. Reality is more crazy than anything you can possibly imagine.

DAVE: *Will you be publishing THE GOTTERDAMMERUNG GIG yourself?*

ANGUS: When I do a strip, it takes so long to get enough material together to do a book that, if I want to bring in some money, I've really got to sell it to a publisher in the meantime. That means a magazine publisher, really. That's what I did with the stories in COMIC TALES. The magazine rights were sold here and there and, over a period of a year and a half, I did all the strips. Eventually, I did a book. It's the only way that you can do things. That practice began in France — I think — with Dargaud. They publish PILOTE which was the earliest magazine of comic strips in France. The French situation is different from the one in America, because all sorts of people read comics in France.

DAVE: *You actually see businessmen sitting on trains reading comics. There isn't a stigma attached to them.*

ANGUS: Whereas I don't think that's true in America. It certainly isn't true in this country. *(Laughter.)*

DAVE: *You'd get less strange looks reading porn.* (Laughter.)

ANGUS: At Dargaud, they would often pay an artist a monthly rate to do a certain number of pages. Out of the finances of running the magazine they did a book. The artist would get a royalty on top of his normal rate. So the album thing grew out of having a magazine. The people at METAL HURLANT said to me that after '68 in France, a lot of new ideas were thrown up. That's when the alternative publishing thing began. When it began, METAL HURLANT came out three or four times a year and all the artists worked for mainstream publishers as well. Things just grew from there. Artists were paid to do so many pages a month, and then they did a book. That's more or less what I did on COMIC TALES.

DAVE: *Did you enjoy doing all the production work and printing for the book?*

ANGUS: Well —

DAVE: *As a learning process?*

ANGUS: Yes, to the extent that most things which bring you joy have got a lot of pain associated with them. *(Laughter.)* Sitting here — looking back at it — I can say that I enjoyed it, because I got away with it by the skin of my teeth. There was a time when I could have ended up in debt to the tune of several thousand pounds. If the situation was still chaotic and if I was still in debt then, obviously, I'd say *no. (Laughter.)* But I got away with it. I got it finished and I learned a *lot*. In that sense, it was worth doing. I know enough about printing now to know how to get what I want. I didn't understand why my work didn't look very good at times — when it was printed by other people — but now I do.

DAVE: *Weren't some of the strips in COMIC TALES prepared using Corben's rather complicated color-separation process?*

ANGUS: One of the things that interested me about underground comics was that they organized their own printing. They took a lot of short-cuts through necessity. One of the most expensive parts of printing in color is

"I combine my techniques with CORBEN's."

MY LAST SUPER '60 DAILIES
$75
$5 P. AND H.
© D.C. COMICS INC 1986
OLD MAG COVERS PAINTED ON WOOD PANELS $400 $15 P. AND H.
WATER COLOR PAINTINGS OF FAVORITE OLD COVERS $140 $750 P. AND H.
FROM THE WORKSHOP OF
WAYNE BORING
280 S. E. 10TH STREET
POMPANO BEACH, FLA. 33060

having the films or separations made. If you can find short-cuts to do that, then you are going to save money. I had found a method of doing it which was different from **Richard Corben's**, but I was curious to compare it with his. I went to the Barcelona Comic Fair and caught him when he had a moment to spare. I introduced myself as a friend of a friend of his from Kansas. I said to him that he obviously started making his own separations because it was a financial short-cut — not a creative thing. Later, of course, it turned into a big creative thing. "This is **Corben's** style of drawing." The information that he gave me was useful. I had to come back and buy a new set of screens. *(Laughter.)* I managed to combine some of my techniques with some of his.

DAVE: *It's not the norm for comics artists to get this involved in what happens after the artwork is finished. Do you actually see yourself as a comic artist — or as something else?*

ANGUS: My image of myself probably hasn't much to do with what other people's image of me is. The thing about drawing comics is that you aren't there when people read your work. It would be nice if you could actually be there for the performance — like a rock musician sharing in the performance — but comics aren't like that. Other people only "know you" by proxy. They don't really know you. All they see is the part of you that you spent being a cartoonist. When I'm not drawing or publishing something then I have no public identity. Most of the people that I see on a day-to-day basis don't know what I do. They don't read what I do.

DAVE: *It's almost like having a secret identity.*

ANGUS: That's probably more true of someone drawing comics and living in Britain than it is of someone doing the same thing and living in France or America. In France, comic artists are like pop stars. They could be like that in America too, because there is such a large market. You've got four or five-hundred million people in America and only 56 million here. There's a much larger audience in America and so they can have larger conventions or places to go and be seen and become famous. In this country, there just isn't that type of thing. I went to an Underground comics convention in Britain — years ago — that involved people like **Hunt Emerson**. You tend to get even fewer people at those than you would at a normal comics convention. Someone commented that there was one person there for every million people in the country. If you were in America and you had one person for every million, you'd have four or five hundred people there. So, in that sense, I don't have a direct relationship with an audience here.

DAVE: *Do you get any feedback from readers at all?*

ANGUS: No.

DAVE: *Not even letters passed on through obscure channels?*

ANGUS: No. A lot of the work which I do through an illustrator's agency means that you don't get that feedback. I did — once — get a letter from the author of a book saying that he liked the cover. It's fairly anonymous being an illustrator. It's almost like having a job and doing it and being paid for your technical skills. You aren't paid for who you are or for thinking creatively or for being an individual. You're just providing a serv-

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"In France, comic artists are like pop stars."

ice. That's how I get money in to pay the bills. Doing comics is something that I do on top of that. You give more of yourself in comics, because the point of doing them is to portray the ideas you have. If you haven't got any ideas or a story to tell, then why do comics? There isn't any reason to draw them. You might as well be an illustrator and do book covers. The thing is, the people who aren't around you have your comics to get your ideas from, and the people who are around you have you. They're two separate things, really. Why do you have to mix them up? I find it spoils things if you talk about work. For example, when Mike gives me a plot we don't talk about it, because the point of the thing is the marks on the paper. Somehow, talking about it really diffuses it. I can remember — in the past — having one or two ideas that I thought were very funny, and then I went and told people about them and they became uninteresting to me.

DAVE: *You'd told the joke so many times that it wasn't funny to you anymore?*

ANGUS: We'd had a good laugh about it and I wanted to move on to something else. So, the life that you lead and the ideas that you have published are two separate things. I could quote **Oscar Wilde** to you.

DAVE: *Go on then.* (Laughter.)

ANGUS: He said, "I put my talent into my art and my genius into my life." It's this idea that living life is much more important than actually writing about it. Just recently, with moving into this house and then Amy coming along, I haven't really done much work. The only way you can get work done is to be like a medieval monk. You lock the doors and almost cease to exist as a person, and you move into a private world, creating things. People only get to see the drawings that you push out under the door. When you come out again, you talk to people, you get ideas, you read newspapers, you watch television. In other words, you see what's going on and then you go back into your box and create. You have to be a bit of a recluse to get work done — but a well-informed recluse. Getting back to your question, I don't see myself as anything in particular. I just feel that when you've got certain ideas that you want to put down — and if doing a comic is the way to do it — then I'll do a comic. I also do illustration, animation, printing, graphics, all sorts of things, really. I'm a person who does lots of different things.

DAVE: *A lot of your work has political overtones. Do you think that comics should be used to get your views across?*

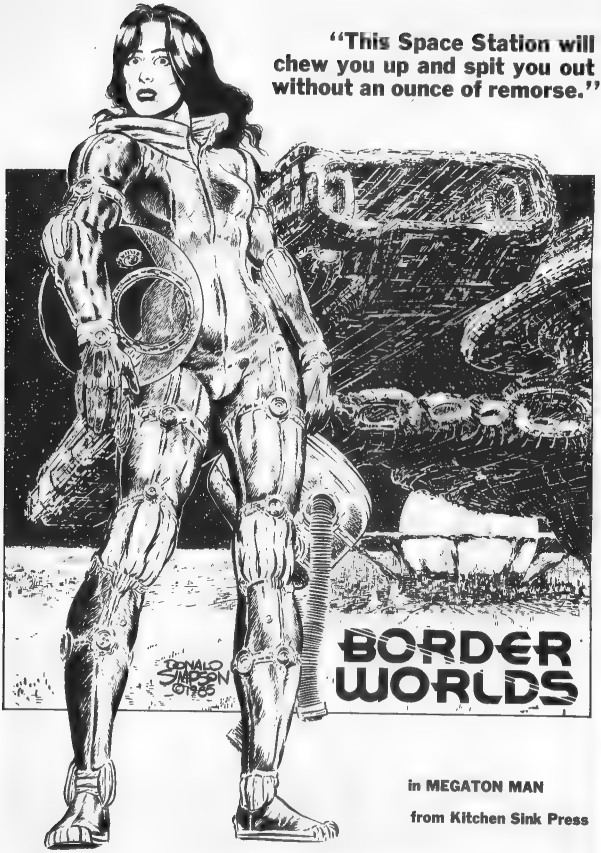
ANGUS: There's a tradition in writing that the writer is always invisible, that the writer should stay out of it personally and just portray a clash of ideas. I appreciate that. I can see that. Really, what you're talking about is the difference between art and politics. If you're a member of any political party, you try and put across the ideas that your party believes in. If you're involved in politics, your enemy, as it were, is the guy in the other political party. But in art, the enemy isn't another person or a group of people, it's a more abstract thing like God, fate, jealousy, the World or even yourself. You can analyze them, intellectually, as two different things — but, obviously, when you live your life, things aren't quite that clear. I can see that if you want to be involved in a very free-flowing creative activity, you wouldn't want to lay down what "this" is or "that" is. Take a **Robert Crumb** strip where the enemy of the artist is the World. You really laughed at that. There was one nice strip that I saw where he set out to reform the World by telling everyone what to do. Slowly, he realized that he had more problems than the rest of the World. He degenerated into a collapsing mass, because he couldn't sort out his own problems. **Crumb** started there with a bit of political propaganda and moved into the realms of what I called the struggle against yourself or the World. He obviously understands what that division between art and politics is. Everyone wants to be an artist and to try and create "art," but I don't see what is wrong with political propaganda either, as long as it's clear that it is political propaganda. If people want to hear your opinions, then why shouldn't you put them across? If they don't want to hear them, then they won't buy it. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as you allow other people a choice — they can always refuse. I don't think that it's as obnoxious to force your ideas onto other people in print, as it is if you have a gun.

DAVE: *You can put the comic down if you want . . .*

ANGUS: I quite like people to print whatever they like, short of libel, I suppose, or fascist and racist stuff which is inciting hatred.

DAVE: *Cutting right back in time, what are your first memories of comics?*

"The King and I," from COMIC TALES.


"This Space Station will chew you up and spit you out without an ounce of remorse."
DONALD SIMPSON ©1985
BORDER WORLDS
in MEGATON MAN
from Kitchen Sink Press

ANGUS McKIE

"I'm always 'borrowing' ideas."

ANGUS: As a kid, I just went down to the local newsagents and bought American comics.

DAVE: *Did you read any of the British ones?*

ANGUS: Yes, I would have picked up those at the same time. I got THE VICTOR, THE HOTSPUR and THE TIGER. I always thought that JET ACE LOGAN was great. I still do. *(Laughter.)* I would love to get hold of that stuff again. British comics probably influenced me more than the American ones, now that you come to mention them. It's just that you tend to forget about them. There's so much American stuff around.

DAVE: *Be careful, this is for an American magazine.* (Laughter.)

ANGUS: Just the idea that every Friday you got the comics through the mailbox and, for an hour, you were away in another world. That was amazing.

DAVE: *Did you have any other favorites?*

ANGUS: H. K. RODD THE WONDERMAN. I used to like. He used to sleep under snow for hours. *(Laughter.)* Everyone else would be freezing to death in their tents and he would go out and say, "I'm just going to bury myself in the snowdrift." He woke up in the morning really fresh, clean and dry. I learned the importance of brevity from British comics. Why use more words than you have to? One thing that I always like about **Corben's** work was that he never used lots of words. I thought that his early work was very good. I always liked the fact that you could do a comic strip using just a few words and you could get the whole plot, maybe an idea and establish the characters just from that. I think brevity is a virtue. I suppose that I've tended to put a lot of words into some of my comic strips, but I hope they're there for a reason.

DAVE: *Other people have put a lot of words into your strips, too. For example, Alan Booth, who wrote SWORDSPELL. That was done for Dez Skinn's first incarnation of WARRIOR, wasn't it?*

ANGUS: And later, FANTASY ADVERTISER. That was an interesting experience. There are a lot of situations in life that you get yourself into not because you say, "Yes," but because there is never any point where you say, "No." *(Laughter.)* **Dez Skinn** introduced me to **Alan Booth** while I was in London helping him on FANTASY ADVERTISER. I helped him paste it up sometimes. I just did one or two pages of SWORDSPELL, and then I did a few more and, before I knew it, I was doing a book. I still can't shake off the shadow of SWORDSPELL, because when I do hand-lettering now it's always crunched-up. *(Laughter.)* There were so many words in it, the only way I could get them in was to develop a style of lettering that was compact, to say the least.

Angus' RULERS OF OUR DREAMS. (Unpublished.)

DAVE: *There always seemed to be such long speeches while people were fighting.*

ANGUS: Alan was really particular about what he wanted, but that was fun, because I'm hopeless at doing anything any way but my own. At the time, I was unemployed, so I just thought, "Oh well, I'll do some drawing — I'll get a new brush and try it out" *(Laughter.)*

DAVE: *Did it lead you into the undergrounds?*

ANGUS: No. I was always interested in the undergrounds. Alan never liked them — he couldn't see what was interesting about them. I can't remember at what point, but I did an underground with **Mike Feeney** called EITHER/OR COMICS which was us trying to do an American underground — tatty newsprint with a nice, glossy cover. Undergrounds reached a peak in the early Seventies, although a lot of the ideas in the actual comics didn't come across to this country until a little later. We did EITHER/OR COMICS in the late Seventies.

DAVE: *So that was after your involvement with Cozmic Comics?*

ANGUS: Yes, I'd forgotten about them. They were reprinting a lot of American underground material.

DAVE: *You'd have the likes of Crumb interspaced with work from aspiring young artists like you, Dave Gibbons and Brian Bolland.*

ANGUS: My first strip would have been "Gardeners Of The Universe" for HALF-ASSED FUNNIES.

DAVE: *That was quite Kirby-esque, artwise.*

ANGUS: That's right. There was a mixture of the comics that I'd been reading — in terms of the art style — but the content was underground. It's all mixed up really. In 1986, things are totally mixed up. What's underground and what's overground now? There is still a difference, but it isn't as clear as it was. It's a bit like what happened in music. In the Sixties, music was split into categories like Blues, Jazz, Country, etc., and it all got assimilated. Eventually, Country music was mixed with Rock — as in the **Flying Burrito Brothers. The Eagles** made it popular. The same had happened to Blues and Rock before. Why does something have to be one thing or the other? We've had fifteen years of underground comics now so they've had time to become mixed with all kinds of things. Certainly, my early work was a mixture. I was always keen on American underground comics, right from art school days. One guy who I liked as well as **Crumb** was the late **Greg Irons**. I thought that his drawings were great and the stories were really good too. I always liked the things that **Spain** did, too.

DAVE: *So you set out wanting to be an un-*

ANGUS McKIE

"Marvel and DC worked a narrow vein."

WHEN IS A STRAIGHT LINE NOT A STRAIGHT LINE? WE DO NOT SEE THE BEAMS IN OUR OWN EYE. SPACE IS CURVED AND THERE ARE NO TRUTHS OUTSIDE THE GATES OF EDEN
FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS THE SAFETY OF SOULS WAS ENTRUSTED TO THEOLOGIANS WHO COULD SPEND MONTHS DEBATING THE PRECISE CORREQUIVENCES THAT ENSUED WHEN A MOUSE NIBBLED A CONSECRATED WAFER

A lesson in cosmic geometry, from Angus' highly acclaimed SO BEAUTIFUL AND SO DANGEROUS.

derground artist. Did you have any aspirations to wanting to draw the likes of the FANTASTIC FOUR?

ANGUS: No. I read them when I was about sixteen, but by the time I'd reached art college, I wasn't reading them, so I didn't really think about drawing them — I was reading undergrounds, think ing about drawing them. What you take in and what you give out are related. You can't just give out when you haven't absorbed anything. I think a lot of people — it's probably true of me, to a certain extent — often emulate other people without actually coming up with a good idea of their own. They probably want to become comics artists because they have seen something that someone else has done and want to copy it. There's nothing wrong with that. You can begin there. There's nothing wrong with copying someone, as long as it's a starting point rather than the end product. If you then go on and turn it into something that only you could have done, then that's fine. Everyone has copied. All down through history, artists have done it. **William Blake** said that if you want to be a great artist, the first way to start is to copy. They had Greek statues to copy from. There seems to be a lot of people who want to be comics artists — or want to work for Marvel or DC — because there's a certain "vogue" attached to it. Certainly, if you're wrapped up in that "World," you read who's drawing what, who's inking what, and you feel that you want to join in. At the time I started, I wasn't reading them.

DAVE: *What interested you so much about the undergrounds?*

ANGUS: In the early to late Seventies, there was still a lot of fall-out from the late Sixties. One thing that I found interesting about the undergrounds was that they tackled all sorts of subjects. Marvel and DC all seemed to be very much of a "type" to me. They worked a narrow vein. About that time, I went to France where they used comics to handle a whole load of different subjects. After '68 in France, everyone thought, "Let's try and do things differently," which is what happened in America after the late Sixties. Instead of comics just being used to entertain kids, they used them to comment on the current situation — current affairs — and for humor or satire that had a really adult, vicious side to it. They were using comics in the way that you would use film or literature — you could tackle any subject. People used to have more preconceptions about film and literature, too. They thought that you could only tackle certain subjects and in a certain way. Slowly, the rules were broken. I think that now, in 1986, people are starting to see that comics can be used to cover different subjects. Not in this country so much — but in France and, to an extent, in America.

DAVE: *Comics have an awful long way to go in this country.*

ANGUS: France seems to be the most open. It has a lot to do with the way that you actually distribute things, as well. The legal side of distribution, in this country, means that if you do anything really *risque* or libelous, the distributor, as well as the publisher and printer, can be prosecuted. I don't think that is true in France. They have different laws of distribution. It's just the publisher that's culpable, so the distributor can't refuse on the basis that he might get into trouble. They have a National Distribution Service, too, in France. Intellectually, living on the Continent means that you have more things going on, as well — different straips, ideas crisscrossing, people trying new things, passing on ideas which others copy and then change. It's happening all the time. America tends to have to get everything out of itself, it's such an incredibly big place. If you live in the Midwest of America, you don't hear anything about Europe. It's a little dot that serves as an outpost of American foreign policy.

AND OF THE PRESENT AGE?
THOUGHT, FEELING AND IMAGINATION ARE AT WAR. THE TASK IS NOT TO ANNUL ONE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE OTHER, BUT ON THE CONTRARY, TO PRESERVE THEIR EQUILIBRIUM, THEIR SIMULTANEITY...
AND THE PLANE ON WHICH THEY ARE UNITED IS EXISTENCE!

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"Things which bring joy have a lot of pain."

DAVE: *A missile base.*

ANGUS: Yes, Airstrip One. England is insulated, too. That little strip of water that's twenty miles wide is a far bigger barrier than the thousands that separate us from America. We don't have that criss-crossing of ideas and influences. In Europe, you tend not to worry about doing something which hasn't got a tradition behind it. There are so many new things happening. There has always been this idea of "the new" in France — which is a French phrase after all, the *"avant-garde."* I remember being at LIBERATION, a left-wing newspaper in Paris, and asking some guy why he liked such-and-such a magazine. He said, "Because it's new." *(Laughter.)* There's a tradition of new things. A *tradition* of new things? *There's* a paradox. *(Laughter.)* So, I didn't set out with a goal in front of me, like wanting to be an artist and working for someone. I just found that, "Oh, that's really great, you can use a comic strip to do that and talk about ideas that you've got. That's great so I'll just do that." I never really thought about where I was going to sell it or where I was going to have it published.

DAVE: *How did you approach METAL HURLANT with "Jetman"?*

ANGUS: I took several months off and went hitch-hiking around the Continent — which was the Seventies' version of what people did in the Sixties, which was going off to India. "Hit the road and find yourself, man." I just went off for a bit of a holiday, really. I went to Morocco, Spain, France. I remember crossing the customs barrier at San Sebastian, into France, and going into a little shop which was full of comics. I thought I'd reached El Dorado. *(Laughter.)* Not being able to read the stories was pretty frustrating, but I liked the drawings. They looked interesting. I went down to the South of France after that, and picked grapes for a while. I always knew that I was circling around Paris, and eventually, I did go there. I'd bought a magazine from a stall in the South of France — a METAL HURLANT — so when I was in Paris, I went to see them. They only had a little office then. I just talked to them and had a look at what they were doing. They were really open and childlike in some ways. They were very young. It was good fun, really enthusiastic. I had done "Jetman" at the time — that was influenced by DAN DARE, one of the first full-color comic strips — so I told them about it and they said that it sounded like what they wanted. I didn't have it with me, obviously, so when I got back to this country, I made them some 35 mm slides. They said, "Great," so I sent them the artwork.

DAVE: *And the next one was "Experiment*

"Beating the Swords into Ploughshears." A poster by Angus for the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmourment.

"Reality is more crazy than any-

with the Airpump, or "Experience Avec La Pompe a Air" if I want to appear cultured . . .

ANGUS: Which was done at the same time that Mike Feeney and I did EITHER/OR COMICS. "Experiment with the Airpump" was two eight-page stories which were printed several issues apart.

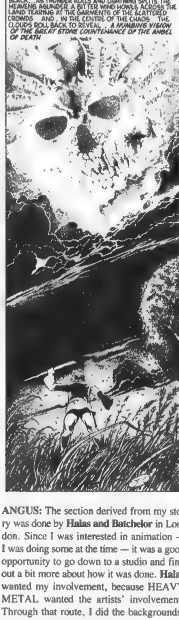
DAVE: *Six issues apart.*

ANGUS: I never used to work on anything regularly in those days. *(Laughter.)* Mike and I wanted to get into printing our own stuff. Rather than just doing full-color artwork, selling it abroad where it was printed on good quality paper, we wanted to do some black-and-white as well. I went down to a local printing cooperative, the Tyneside Free Press, and asked the guy to print a four-color cover. He had a tatty old little press and he said, "Oh no, I'll never do that. I'll never get the register." He saw the yellow separation and said, "I'll never print all that yellow. The rollers won't take it." Of course, he did all right. We told him that we were going to print the insides on newsprint on a table-top offset litho. "You'll never get newsprint through it. It'll just chew it up." Being stupid and ignorant, we went and did it all right. *(Laughter.)* I was always trying to do little projects of my own, as well as trying to sell my work.

DAVE: *Was SO BEAUTIFUL AND SO DANGEROUS done specifically for HEAVY METAL?*

ANGUS: Yes, it was. I was at the agency in London, Young Artists, talking to **Roger Dean**. It was at a time when he was looking for lots of new artists. He had just done ESCHATUS with **Bruce Pennington**. I think that he wanted to get into publishing lots of books. He obviously made some money when he did his own book, VIEWS. I showed him some of my animation backgrounds and he said that **Len Mogel** would probably like my style of drawing. I asked him who **Len Mogel** was and he explained that he was a guy who was publishing a magazine called HEAVY METAL. I had a couple of pages of comics work, so I sent them to Len. I was planning it as an eight-page story, but they said, "Great, we'll do a book." "What?" *(Laughter.)* I'd always wanted to do a long strip, so I did a book out of it. I had done what were originally pages one and two. They became two and three, because I needed to add a new opening page That explains why there are so many words on that first page — because, to get the plot that I wanted, I had to write it from scratch and get all the words in. It also explains why none of the major characters appear in the first eight pages.

DAVE: *It became part of HEAVY METAL — THE MOVIE, which you were also involved with.*


IN THE VALLEY THE PEOPLE TURN IN RAGE AS THE SKY GROWS BLACK... AS THUNDER ROLLS AND LIGHTNING SPLITS THE HEAVENS ASUNDER, A BITTER WIND HOWLS ACROSS THE LAND TEARING AT THE GARMENTS OF THE BLOTTERED CROWDS... AND IN THE CENTRE OF THE CHAOS... THE CLOUDS ROLL BACK TO REVEAL... A MUMBLING VISION OF THE BALEFUL STONE COUNTENANCE OF THE ANGEL OF DEATH

ANGUS: The section derived from my story was done by **Halas and Batchelor** in London. Since I was interested in animation — I was doing some at the time — it was a good opportunity to go down to a studio and find out a bit more about how it was done. **Halas** wanted my involvement, because HEAVY METAL wanted the artists' involvement. Through that route, I did the backgrounds. I was also involved in doing some artwork for the special effects.

DAVE: *Who worked out the script for the movie version?*

ANGUS: There was a false start on the film. I wrote a script with **Paul Halas,** John's son, based on something that **Harry Harrison** had written. Originally, it was going to be a half-hour long. We had quite a funny script worked out, but then there were problems with the money people. They wanted more say in it. It's always the same with big projects like films — people always want something for their money. Script writers were brought in who were under more control. It was eventually reduced to only about fifteen minutes. The film plot was really just a few cameos taken from different stories. They had a problem with how to link the stories togther, too.

DAVE: *How did you feel about all this?*

ANGUS: I didn't mind what they did. When I signed the contract for SO BEAUTIFUL AND SO DANGEROUS, **Len Mogel** had just become involved in the publishing world from somewhere else. Since it was all new to him, he had a huge team of lawyers or something and he wanted to make sure that he was covering himself from every angle. He tended to want everything. I didn't mind — he could have everything! *(Laughter.)* I wasn't really bothered about the thing becoming popular later on. I always knew, more or less, what it was worth. The only thing that I wanted him to take out of the contract was that they would have the first rights on my next book. I had that taken out after an involved discussion. The film rights and everything else, they had. It does lapse back to me at a certain point. Eventually, I think he found out that things weren't as valuable as he thought they were. There are only a certain number of things that you can do with a comic strip. He probably thought that one day he'd get another Mickey Mouse or something. *(Laughter.)* I think the situation is a lot more relaxed now. They had the film rights and they were going to do it anyway, so I agreed to work on it. As long as my name was credited only for what I did, people could see what I was responsible for. The other aspects of the film weren't anything to do with me. What was to do with me was what I had written — and I didn't write the film, I wrote the book.

DAVE: *Weren't you offered the comics adaptation of ALIEN at one point?*

ANGUS: That was brought up. **Len Mogel** was looking around for someone to do the ALIEN book. He asked me if I was willing to do a bit of moonlighting and I said, "Christ, I'm moonlighting already, working on SO BEAUTIFUL AND SO DANGEROUS. I can hardly keep up with it." *(Laughter.)* I couldn't have done it.

DAVE: *You had to choose between your own stuff and the movie adaptation?*

ANGUS: I had to finish what I was doing. It's tempting to do these projects where things are allied to big things like movies, but there's a lot of hassles. If you aren't getting a lot of money out of it — then why do it? If you've got enough money to live and your time free to do what you want, why do you need the hassles?

DAVE: *It's much easier to do what you want to do.*

ANGUS: Yes, just do what you want to do.

thing you can possibly imagine."

Just please yourself. It might have been an easy project to do but, then again, it might not have been. I've got a feeling that there might have been all sorts of people saying things like, "You haven't got this likeness here." I didn't want that sort of pressure. They had to produce the book very quickly and I couldn't have done it without hacking it. I have hacked out work. On occasion, I've allowed myself to be mesmerized by a deadline. It's fatal, really. You should do it until you think it's right. I didn't mind not doing the book, I was quite happy doing my own stuff.

DAVE: *Will we ever see a sequel to SO BEAUTIFUL AND SO DANGEROUS?*

ANGUS: I suppose that it's possible, but I don't know if it'll happen or not. It depends on so many things. I don't think that the original sold that well, so maybe there isn't the market for it

DAVE: *Or wasn't a market for it. Things have opened up a bit now.*

ANGUS: Maybe if it was done in a comic-book format. I don't really know enough about that. I would like to make some changes to the original and then see it published in France. I don't want to change it too much. It's a bit of a luxury to go back over what you've done before and then try and get it published when you've still got work to do and finish. I liked the idea of the mix between humor and drama. The two characters seemed, to me, to reflect two interesting aspects of things. There's Willie, who just can't cope with life, and then there's Steve, who can cope easily. It was interesting to write dialogue with the clash between the two, to come up with jokes. I've got loads of different scenes scrawled in notebooks with those two types of characters — or maybe it is actually those two characters. Maybe one day I'll use them. If I was ever to do anything on a regular basis — to earn a living from comics, and if I wanted to do something — it would probably be SO BEAUTIFUL AND SO DANGEROUS. There are lots of other things that I'm interested in doing — one-offs in different styles. The good thing about doing one-offs is that, once you've done it, you can move on to something else. But, the advantage of doing a long series is that you get to know your characters and they suggest things to you, as well. I can imagine that when you get older, you can look back and see your own life story in them — how they've grown and changed. Even though I draw only for the present, it's an interesting thought that these marks on paper will be around when you, yourself, have long gone. Someone once said, "Posterity is to the Philosopher what the Next World is to the Religious Man."

Title picture from "Experiment with the Airpump," published in METAL HURLANT.

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LAST WORD

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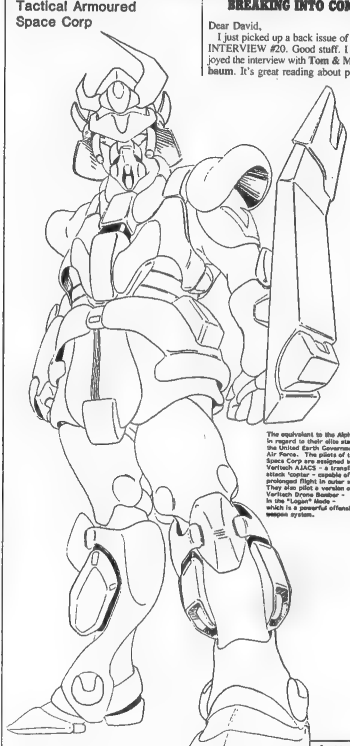
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BREAKING INTO COMICS

Dear David,

I just picked up a back issue of COMICS INTERVIEW #20. Good stuff. I really enjoyed the interview with **Tom & Mary Bierbaum**. It's great reading about people trying to break into comics. I am trying to do just that. I wonder if you know how I could get in touch with the A.P.A.s (Amateur Press Association). Do you know any of their mailing addresses? Or any fanzines looking for an artist? Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Richard Aramburo
517 W. Oregon St.
Tucson, AZ 85706

While I can't put you in direct contact with any A.P.A.s, Richard, I've done the next best thing by printing your letter here, where it will be widely seen. Who knows, maybe you'll be hearing from one or more of them in the near future. Meanwhile, you might try contacting mighty Mike Sopp, whose letter follows immediately — and remember, if you make it in the big time as a retail of all this, Richard, don't forget to pay the commissions to me!

— DAK

BREAKING INTO COMICS: THE SEQUEL

David:

Thanks for the copy of COMICS INTERVIEW #24 complete with my name on the other side, for once. It was quite an ego trip, and I am looking forward to more assistant editing.

On a similar line, I have been told that you might be able to help me out. I have formed an organization known as THE CHAIN for would-be comic-book professionals. We number 37 strong, but could still use more people.

If you run across anyone who has the desire and talent to be a comic-book professional, could you please give them my address? This way we can add more people to the group and give them a chance to meet other writers and artists.

Sincerely,
Mike Sopp438 W. 32
Erie, PA 16508

BOTH SIDES OF AN ARGUMENT

Dear Dave;

In regards to #23, I ask that you print the enclosed letter in fairness to presenting both sides of an argument. This is a letter I've sent to **Mr. Macek** himself, but I want original MACROSS fans out there to know that someone else out there knows what's going on and doesn't like it.

Thanks for your time. I like your mag — keep it up. (The interview with **Phil Foglio** was great!)

Raymond Miller

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MACEK vs. MACROSS (OR ROBOTECH THE ATROCITY)

Dear Mr. Macek:

I'll say this right out front. I think ROBOTECH: MACROSS is the biggest atrocity ever committed on fine art.

MACROSS was the *best* series ever made in Japan, and *you* twist it out of shape and combine it with two other series that have nothing to do with it.

WHO OR WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE!?

You've taken a great thing and retarded it to the point where the stupid and tasteless American television-viewing moron can watch his "giant robots" and have what little is left of the story explained to him by a narrator who points out and explains the obvious for those who are too stupid to understand what few plot subtleties you've left intact.

You've done petty things such as change Milia's name to Miriah and Claudia Lassalle's name to Claudia *Grant* and more grandiose and *cliched* acts such as rename the Valkyrie Battroid to Varitech Battloid (words that make my skin crawl every time I hear them) and to Guardian.

And PROTOCULTURE! Yes, I can't forget this protoculture stupidity!

And now that ROBOTECH is so popular, all the 7- to 14-year-old viewers are buying all of the original MACROSS books and models so that the *real* MACROSS fans, who know what's really going on, can't get any original merchandise because it's all sold out.

Furthermore, you've gone on to squelch any reference to the *original* MACROSS (such as your very bad adaptation of Boobytrap) so that no one will ever know that there was ever anything but CARL MACEK'S ROBOTECH

But now you've gone on to twist and corrupt Leiji Matsumoto's classic CAPTAIN HARLOCK and QUEEN OF 1000 YEARS; two programs which, like MACROSS, are too complex and intelligent to be fit for viewing by the American public in their original and unedited forms.

In closing, I'd like to say that the thought of you and what you've done sickens me utterly.

And I warn you to keep your hands off of LUPIN III, ORGUSS, NAUSICAA, or anything else you might think of destroying.

Raymond Miller
3 N. Morgantown Street
Fairchance, PA 15436

A WORD FROM WOOLFOLK

DEAR DAK.

"What's in a name?" asked Juliet of her Romeo, adding that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

Juliet was wrong. If a rose were called a gloxinia or a cineraria or an anemone or a hydrangea or a nasturtium, I'm not sure how sweet it would smell.

And persons whose name are misspelled owing to gremlins or to the difficulty of translating the spoken to the written word are sure to be indignant. This is a law of nature.

By that law I stand convicted. In **Lou Mougin**'s brilliantly written, artfully abridged and gracefully designed interview with me, several names were by misadventure written wrong. If these mistakes are not corrected, I will be dining on crow for some time to come.

Ergo and herewith:

There is no *Bill* **Millard**, and if there is he didn't write comics. **Joseph J. Millard** wrote comics very well indeed. He was chief writer at Fawcett at a time when I had not yet been discovered in the bulrushes.

Nita Panguay is a great name to use the next time I use a Spanish dancer in a novel, which I do frequently. **Eva Tanguay**, however, is the name of the vaudeville star who reigned in an era before I was born — back when the world was flat.

Batten, Barton, Durkin and Osborn (BBD&O to the cognoscenti) is more readily identified as Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborne — and the name *still*

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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sounds like a trunk falling downstairs

Harry Luce, the artist who did THE HANGMAN at MLJ Comics was, to the best of my recollection, **Harry Lucey**. If he is still extant and reads this interview, he will undoubtedly try to hang me for getting his name wrong.

Ernie Bailey will be remembered by those in their dotage (as I am) as **Bernard Bailey**. He ran a comic-book shop. Various artists and writers were manacled to the oars of his galley.

Few enough corrections, I agree, in a long interview that was transposed from telephone talk into the written word. **Lou Mougin**, like the adroit interviewer he is, weaseled comments from me that I regret but cannot deny. If I sounded my own trumpet too loudly at times, and I think I did, I hope your readers will understand how rarely talent matches ego.

One caveat. Your preview of Part Two of the interview announces that I disclose what I really think about **Mort Weisinger** (unprintable, though it is now in print) and **Stan Lee**. I should qualify any expression about **Stan Lee** by saying my opinion is second hand. I never worked for him. My ex-wife **Dorothy Woolfolk** did. I borrowed her opinion, which was, roughly translated, that if you liked him it was simply because you did not know him.

I cannot vouch that her opinion is true. My bugles are now blowing Retreat.

Also, there are two mentions in the interview of minor details that **Jim Steranko** got wrong. There is no mention of the incredible number of more important things that he got right.

That also goes for **Lou Mougin**, your demon interviewer

As for COMICS INTERVIEW — *damn you!* You've got me interested in comics all over again.

William Woolfolk
New Canaan, CT 06840

Gee, and all those goofs were just from Part One of your interview, Bill! Wait 'til you've seen Part Two!

— DAK

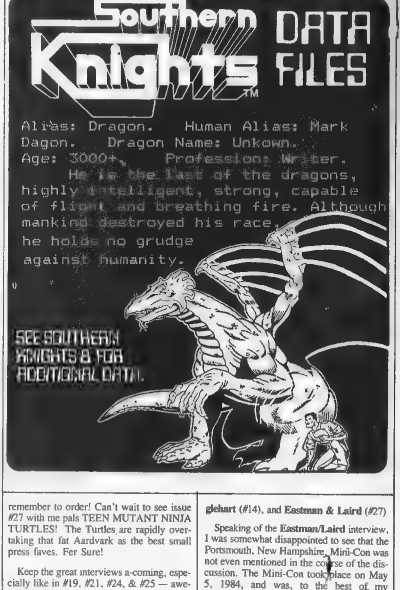
BACK ISSUES: GENEROUS OFFER

Dear DAK:

Finally got through the mega-issue #25 featuring a "talk" with **John Byrne**. Very interesting, especially all the sidetracking and tangents. He does like to ramble on, eh?

Please, send me the separately-listed back issues of COMICS INTERVIEW — yes, I'm taking advantage of your generous offer of 5 for $10!! I (somehow) missed some issues and would appreciate it, if you could send them A.S.A.P.).

By the way, I do find out about the upcoming issues from your news-flier that Westfield Comics sends me. I like the fliers and it does influence which issues I need to


Southern Knights
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Alias: Dragon. Human Alias: Mark Dagon. Dragon Name: Unkown. Age: 3000+. Profession: Writer.
He is the last of the dragons, highly intelligent, strong, capable of flight and breathing fire. Although mankind destroyed his race, he holds no grudge against humanity.
SEE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS 8 FOR ADDITIONAL DATA.

remember to order! Can't wait to see issue #27 with me pals TEEN MUTANT NINJA TURTLES! The Turtles are rapidly overtaking that fat Aardvark as the best small press faves. Fer Sure!

Keep the great interviews a-coming, especially like in #19, #21, #24, & #25 — awesome summer!!

Jon Rosenberg
803 E. Spooner Road
Milwaukee, WI 53217

GRAFT & CORRUPTION FOR A PLUG

Dear DAK.

I have been buying COMICS INTERVIEW since the first issue came out and, except for a few tragic occurrences (please see the enclosed note and check), I have a complete collection. Each and every issue has something of interest in it, and that is why I keep buying every month. Some of my favorite interviews have been with **Mark Evanier** (#2), **Bill Griffith** (#8), **Steve Englehart** (#14), and **Eastman & Laird** (#27)

Speaking of the **Eastman/Laird** interview, I was somewhat disappointed to see that the Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Mini-Con was not even mentioned in the course of the discussion. The Mini-Con took place on May 5, 1984, and was, to the best of my knowledge, the official debut of "THE TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES. Both **Eastman** and **Laird** were there, clad in TMNT T-shirts. The shirt that sticks in my mind was the one parodying THOR #338. Copies of TMNT #1 (first printing) were on sale for the cover price and, of course, I am still kicking myself for only buying one rather than the entire table full. Anyway, the organizer of the convention, **Ralph DiBernado**, runs the comic shop where I buy your magazine every month and he promised me hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of free merchandise if I correct this oversight in my letter to you.

Thanks for many hours of interesting reading. Suggestions for future interviews include **Mark Evanier** (again), **Gary Trudeau**, and **Jack Kirby**.

Charles Roman
397 Bartlett St.
Portsmouth, NH 03801

BACK ISSUES

Order any 2 for $5 — or any 5 for $10.

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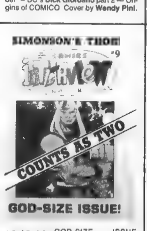

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CENSORSHIP DEBATE SNUFFED

Dear David,

I think we've run this censorship debate into the ground, but I'd just like to say a few final words on our exchanges. I think that you and I are probably a lot closer in our pragmatic views on censorship (i.e. on how we would like to see things operate in the real world) than our previous words might make it seem. In your reply to my letter printed in #26, you say "Reporting bad news is not the same thing as *causing* bad news." Precisely! I agree entirely! This ties in directly to my distinction between a snuff film and, say (to use your example), network field reporters. The producer of a snuff film *causes* a murder because the murder is staged exclusively for the purpose of being filmed as "entertainment." Thus, the act of filming it sets becomes part of the process of murdering — and is thus in an entirely different moral category from mere *reporting* of a murder. If you say that the law against murder is sufficient to deal legally with snuff films, I do not disagree. However, my point was that any suppression of snuff films is a form of censorship *even if it is not effected via censorship laws* (as I said in my letter). In this context, I was viewing censorship more in a moral framework, instead of a legal one. (I suspect that you would agree that one main difficulty with any censorship law is that it can always be twisted to censor far more than its authors intended.)

I very much enjoy the **Wolfman/Greenberger** interview about CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS. It gave a good background for the series, yet did not give away any crucial events of yet-unpublished issues. (I almost put off reading it so that I wouldn't chance having a Big Secret revealed prior to reading CRISIS #12. I'm glad I trusted you and went ahead and read it.)

Though I have played some conflict-simulation games, I have never had the opportunity to play any role-playing games and thus I approached the **Lewis/Gordon** interview very much as an "outsider". However, I found it to be a worthwhile (and understandable!) look at the development of the DC HEROES game. Particularly interesting were the comments on how the good/evil morality is an inherent part of super-hero games, as opposed to other role-playing games. The mythic approach to good and evil that is at the heart of the super-hero genre has always been greatly appealing to me and I'm happy to see that philosophy transferred into the game-playing process.

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